THE POETRY OF CHAUCER

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THE POETRY OF CHAUCER

THE POETRY OF CHAUCER

A GUIDE TO ITS STUDY AND APPRECIATION

BY

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PREFACE

During the last twenty years, the poetry of Chaucer has been attaining an ever increasing popularity. Not only in our colleges and universities, but among the lovers of good literature at large, the discovery has been made that the difficulty of Chaucer's language is by no means so great as at first appears, and that whatever difficulty there may be is richly compensated by the delights which his poetry has to offer. Meanwhile the scholars of Europe and America have been busy at the task of explaining what needs explanation, of investigating the problems of Chaucer's sources, and of determining the order in which his works were composed. It is the purpose of the present volume to render accessible to readers of Chaucer the fruits of these investigations, in so far as they conduce to a fuller appreciation of the poet and his work. For the benefit of those who wish to go more deeply into the subject, rather copious bibliographical references are given in the footnotes. Of Chaucer's biography we know little that is really significant; and that little has been frequently retold. It has, therefore, seemed better to omit any connected account of Chaucer's life, and to give in the discussion of the individual poems such biographical details as serve to illuminate them.

From the very nature of his task, the author's obligations are manifold. From Tyrwhitt down, there is hardly a Chaucerian scholar by whose labors he has not profited, as a glance at the footnotes will show. To Professor Ten Brink, to Professor Lounsbury, to

Professor Skeat, and to Dr. Furnivall and his collaborators in the work of the Chaucer Society, his debt is particularly large. In making quotations and citations, Skeat's Student's Chaucer has been used; and the order in which the several works of the poet are taken up is, with one slight exception, that in which they are there printed. This has seemed, on the whole, the most convenient order; but the reader may take the chapters in any order he pleases. To my friends, Professor Albert S. Cook of Yale University and Professor Charles G. Osgood of Princeton University, I am indebted for much valuable criticism.

R. K. R.

Princeton University
May 25, 1906.

A CHRONOLOGICAL SURVEY OF CHAUCER'S LIFE AND WORKS

(The few significant facts of Chaucer's life given below rest on documentary evidence, and may, therefore, be regarded as certain. The chronology of his works is very uncertain; so that the order here indicated must be regarded as merely tentative.)

LIFE	WORKS
1340 Chaucer born in London. His father, John Chaucer, was a vintner, and was in some way connected with the court of Edward III. (The date, 1340, is conjectural.)	
1357 Attached, as a page (?), to the household of Elizabeth, Duchess of Clarence.	To this general period may be assigned the *Romaunt of the Rose*, and the 'balades, roundels, virelayes,' referred to in the Prologue to the *Legend of Good Women*.
1359 Serves in the English army in France, and taken prisoner by the French.	
1367 Granted a life pension for his services as valet in the king's household.	
	1369 *The Book of the Duchess.*
1372–73 First diplomatic mission to Italy.	
1374 Appointed Comptroller of the customs and subsidy of wools, skins, and leather for the port of London. (We know that in this year the poet was already married. His wife, Philippa, was probably sister-in-law to John of Gaunt.)	To this general period it has been proposed to assign the stories of Constance and Cecilia, now known as the tales of the Man of Law and the Second Nun respectively. Perhaps the *Monk's Tale* in its original form belongs here also.
1377 Diplomatic missions in Flanders and France.	In the decade 1375–1385 we may place: the translation of Boethius, *Troilus and Criseyde*, *Palamon and Arcite* (now known as the *Knight's Tale*), the story of Griselda (*Clerk's Tale*), the *Parliament of Fowls* (1382), and the *House of Fame*, all of which show the influence of Chaucer's Italian journeys. The relative order of these works has not been satisfactorily determined.
1378 Second journey to Italy in the king's service.	
1382 Appointed Comptroller of the petty customs. (This office he held in addition to his earlier office in the customs.)	
1385 Granted permission to exercise his office as comptroller through a permanent deputy.	

1386 Member of Parliament for Kent. Gives up his London house (and resides at Greenwich ?). Deprived (by a hostile faction at court ?) of his offices in the customs.
1387 Death of Chaucer's wife.
1389 Appointed Clerk of the King's Works at Westminster.
1390 Clerk of the King's Works at Windsor, and member of a commission to repair the banks of the Thames between Woolwich and Greenwich.

1394 Granted an additional pension of 20 *l.* a year. (The poet seems, however, to have been in financial difficulty.)

1399 On the accession of Henry IV, Chaucer's pension again increased. He leases a house in Westminster.
1400 Chaucer's death.

1385–86 *The Legend of Good Women.*

Soon after 1387, we may suppose, were begun the *Canterbury Tales*, on which the poet probably worked intermittently till his death.

1391 *Treatise on the Astrolabe.*
1393 *Envoy to Scogan.*

1396–97 *Envoy to Bukton.*
1399 *To his Empty Purse.*

CONTENTS

I. Chaucer's England 1

II. Chaucer 14

III. The Romaunt of the Rose 45

IV. The Minor Poems 57

V. Boethius and the Astrolabe 80

VI. Troilus and Criseyde 87

VII. The House of Fame 123

VIII. The Legend of Good Women 135

IX. The Canterbury Tales, Group A . . . 151

X. The Canterbury Tales, Group B . . . 181

XI. The Canterbury Tales, Groups C and D . 219

XII. The Canterbury Tales, Groups E, F, G, H, I . 253

Appendix. The Study of Chaucer . . . 291

Index 293

THE POETRY OF CHAUCER

CHAPTER I

CHAUCER'S ENGLAND

It is five hundred years and more since Geoffrey Chaucer was 'nayled in his cheste,' and laid in what is now known as the Poets' Corner of Westminster Abbey. Many things have happened since that day: a new half-world has been discovered; mighty nations have had their birth; there have been wars and revolutions; the great world of science has been opened up, changing deeply our thoughts and beliefs, altering radically the conditions of our industrial and social life; one poet greater than Chaucer has arisen to grace our English tongue. Chaucer would have been intensely interested in all these things, could he have known them; but for him they did not exist. If we are to enter into the spirit of his poetry, we must forget for the time being the present-day world, and all that has happened in five hundred years, and live again in a day long dead. We must, with William Morris, —

> Forget six counties overhung with smoke,
> Forget the snorting steam and piston stroke,
> Forget the spreading of the hideous town;
> Think rather of the pack-horse on the down,
> And dream of London, small, and white, and clean,
> The clear Thames bordered by its gardens green.

When this leap into the dark backward and abysm of time has been accomplished, many of the comforts

and luxuries of modern life will be found missing: houses are less comfortable; traveling is a slow and dangerous process; there are no newspapers, no telephones, no tea, coffee, or tobacco. Yet I fancy that these things are not so indispensable as our modern world thinks. For those of artistic tastes there is rich compensation in the external beauty of the life around. Nearly all the buildings of modern London which are really works of art were standing in Chaucer's day; many buildings of equal beauty were standing then which have since perished. In place of the dingy, ugly, monotonous buildings which now line the streets of London town, stood picturesque houses of half-timber, decorated in bright colors. The throngs of people passing through the streets must have been a constant source of interest and pleasure; men did not then try to efface themselves by sober suits of black or gray. My lord passes by resplendent in bright colored silks and velvets, his retainers clothed in their distinguishing livery; every trade has its peculiar costume. There are processions and pageants, with banners and waving plumes. Inside the houses one finds quaintly carved furniture and splendid pictured tapestries. There is a darker side to this picture, which we must also see before we are done; but on the surface it is a gay and beautiful life that we have entered. This is indeed 'merry England.'

There are many intellectual interests as well. The right of the people to govern themselves in Parliament is being fought out. The English Church is trying to limit the usurpations of the papal power; Wiclif and his poor preachers are sowing the seeds of the English Reformation. English commerce is extending itself. There is exciting news of the war with France.

Interesting from many varied aspects, the fourteenth

century is of particular significance to the student of literature and culture, because in it the movement of the Renaissance first assumed definite form, and our modern world began. But if the modern world had begun to assert itself, the mediæval world had by no means passed away. Side by side they stood, the old and the new, essentially hostile to each other, yet blended and intermingled through the whole range of society, often in most incongruous fashion. Because of their coexistence it is easy to compare and contrast them.

Any attempt at an inclusive definition of mediævalism and of the Renaissance is a perilous, perhaps an impossible, undertaking; but it is not so difficult to differentiate the two in their main characteristics and tendencies, always remembering that we have to do not so much with two periods of history as with two opposing attitudes of mind, two habits of thought, which have always existed side by side, with now one, now the other, in the ascendant. The fundamental distinction, I think, lies in the fact that the mediæval mind has its gaze fixed primarily on the spiritual and abstract, that of the Renaissance on the sensuous and concrete. 'Mediævalism proclaims that the eternal things of the spirit are alone worth while; the Renaissance declares that a man's life consists, if not in the abundance of the things he possesses, at any rate in the abundance and variety of the sensations he enjoys.' Though it is a characteristic of the greatest minds that they belong to no party, Dante and Shakespeare may be taken to represent, in their dominant tendencies, the two habits of thought. In their power of poetic insight and observation the two poets are nearly equal; but Dante, following the natural bent of his spirit, portrayed the world in terms of the abstract, through the language of

symbols; his great poem is a vision, and the personages of his drama are disembodied souls dwelling in a realm of spirit; while Shakespeare shows us men and women as concrete individuals, living and moving in an actual, material world.

As a direct result of this basic distinction, we pass to another which is of almost equal significance. In its dealings with society and with humanity in general, the mediæval tends towards communism, the Renaissance towards individualism; for the individual is a concrete fact, the community is an abstract ideal. To the mediæval mind, man is a member of a great spiritual family, the body of Christ, the Church catholic and universal. His true happiness, temporal and eternal, is inseparable from the welfare of humanity as a whole. 'For none of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself.' Thus Dante, in contrasting spiritual and material benefits, explains that with material things the larger the number who share in a benefit, the smaller is the share of each; while with spiritual blessings, in particular the joys of Paradise, the larger the number of souls who share, the greater is the portion of each. To the mind of the Renaissance, then, bent on the sensuous and material, the individual man, his personal strivings and accomplishment, becomes the main interest. We have the thirst for personal fame, as exemplified in the vanity of a Petrarch, replacing the anonymous zeal of the cathedral-builders. We have the national tendency, the idea of patriotism, as opposed to the mediæval conception of a united Christendom, a Holy Roman Empire. We have a splitting up of the social body into small groups of individuals, but slightly interested in one another's welfare. And as the consciousness of the whole community begins to fade, art and literature become limited in their appeal, no longer

speaking to the whole people, but becoming the exclusive possession of the educated favored classes, a tendency which is clearly evident in Petrarch's scorn for compositions in the vernacular.

In the realm of thought, a precisely similar development takes place: the age of faith gives way to the age of reason. 'Faith is the evidence of things not seen,' that is, of the invisible world, the spiritual. Reason, of necessity, confines itself mainly to things which can be seen and handled; in a word, to the sensuous and material. Or, again, to relate this development to that suggested in the preceding paragraph, faith, or authority, rests on a communistic basis. A belief in the benevolence of God, or in the immortality of the soul, is based, apart from any supernatural revelation, on the universality of man's instinct that these facts are so. This universal instinct gains definiteness in the body of dogma held and taught consistently by the Church, an essentially communistic organization. According to the mediæval idea, the individual man has literally no right to think for himself; the right of private judgment, which lies at the very foundation of Protestantism, is nothing but a corollary of the individualism of the Renaissance.

In the domain of religion and conduct this 'right of private judgment' has had a curious twofold development. Among the more austere races of the north it gave rise to the Protestant Reformation, and, carried out to its logical conclusion, to that 'Protestantism of the Protestant religion' which we call Puritanism. Protestantism is essentially the religion of the individual. This may be proved first of all by its tendency to break up into sects; it is in its very nature centrifugal. The Protestant, again, is largely concerned with what he calls the salvation of his own soul, and in the

process of achieving this he feels no need of priestly mediation; he insists, rather, on his direct and personal relation to the Deity. It is individualism in religion. The Protestant proceeds to create for himself, and with delightful inconsistency attempts to force upon others, a moral code of his own, harsh and unlovely, of which the Puritan observance of the Sabbath is a good example. At the opposite extreme from Puritanism is the other development of the Renaissance spirit, most conspicuous among the more passionate peoples of the south, in which men used their right of private judgment to overthrow all religion and morality. Morality conveniently divides itself into duty towards God and duty towards one's neighbor. If one doubts the existence of God, he disposes easily of one half of his duty; if he exalts his individual well-being at the expense of the common good of society, his duty towards his neighbor troubles him but little. And so we find in the Italian Renaissance a strong tendency towards irreligion and immorality, which may express itself in the moral laxity and religious indifference of a Boccaccio, or in the diabolic malignity of a Cæsar Borgia or a Catherine de Medici.

If, now, we try to balance up the profit and loss to civilization and culture which have ensued on the triumph of that Renaissance spirit, which is still dominant at the present day, we shall find the account a complicated one. To the heightened interest in material and sensuous things, and to the activity of the individual mind, we owe, of course, the whole of our modern science; to the same causes we owe a great part of our noblest literature and art, our Michael Angelo and our Shakespeare. This is no mean debt. Yet we must remember that this very art which we prize is a possession of only the few; the 'plain man' has no portion in it. Of

what sort are the books and pictures which we produce for him? Art has been divorced from daily life. If we have greater poems and finer pictures than the Middle Ages knew, what of our carpets, our hangings, our furniture, our buildings, the dishes from which we eat? Then, too, we have to charge up against the Renaissance our complexity of life, our unsettled doubts, our ambitions and discontents. And, lastly, there is the hideous fact that our boasted civilization is largely a civilization of materialism, of selfishness and legalized greed. After studying the past and studying the present, we must strive to see both the benefits and the limitations which these two great world-tendencies have to offer, and, holding narrowly to neither, must so adjust and balance the two that we may attain to that golden mean which shall usher in the golden world.

In the light of these distinctions between mediævalism and the Renaissance, it will be well to pass in hasty review the great movements of the fourteenth century, political, social, religious, and literary, in order to see more clearly in what sort of a world Chaucer lived and worked.

Politically, the most significant movement, in England at least, is the trend towards national consciousness. Henry II, on his accession to the throne of England in 1154, controlled more than half of what is now France. Normandy he inherited from the Conqueror, Anjou from his father, Geoffrey; Aquitaine was his through the right of Eleanor his queen. Normandy and Anjou had been lost in the reign of King John (1199–1216); but Aquitaine was still a possession of the English crown when Edward III came to the throne in 1327. The national tendency, asserting itself in France, led the French king to the endeavor to bring all Frenchmen under his own control; and this was

the ultimate cause of the Hundred Years' War, which began in 1337. The long continued war served to strengthen immeasurably in each country the budding instinct of patriotism. Men began to feel that they were Englishmen or Frenchmen; and the idea of a Holy Roman Empire faded gradually from their thoughts.

The battle of Crécy (1346) and of Poitiers (1356) had not only fanned the flame of patriotism, but, won as they were by the archery of English yeomen, they increased immensely the importance of the middle classes, and hastened the fall of feudalism. With this increased importance of the commoners went a corresponding increase in the power of Parliament, which reached its flood tide in the 'Good Parliament' of 1376. It is in this period that we first find clearly asserted the right of Parliament to vote taxes, on which as a corner-stone has since been built the edifice of English liberty.

This democratic tendency in English politics is even more plainly marked in the social and industrial development of the fourteenth century. With the rapid growth of commerce and manufacture, and the consequently increased importance of the towns, there arose a large and prosperous *bourgeois* class, which, being as it was entirely without the pale of the feudal system, hastened its disintegration. For a discontented serf could become a freeman by establishing a legal residence in one of the towns; and the vassal of higher station found himself overtopped in wealth, and consequently in influence, by the prosperous burgher. The emancipation of the laboring class from the bonds of serfdom was furthered by the great plague which swept over England, as over the rest of Europe, in 1348 and 1349. With half the population wiped out, the landown-

ers found themselves with only half the former supply of labor, and only half the demand for their products. The price of labor rose, and the price of bread fell. The old feudal obligation of the serf to labor a certain number of days on his master's land had already, in large measure, been commuted into a money rent, and the laborers were not slow to take advantage of the opportunity to demand higher wages for their labor. The attempts to control the price of labor by legislation had little effect save to irritate the laborers, an irritation which reached its climax in the peasants' revolt of 1381. This revolt, suppressed by the courage and good judgment of the boy king, Richard II, though barren of any direct and immediate results, exerted a lasting influence on the temper of the lower classes, fostering in them a spirit of independence which made them no longer a negligible quantity in the life of the nation. They ceased to be merely a part of the social organism, and became, with their betters, individuals conscious of their individuality.

The new-born spirit of nationality, which was pervading all of English life, found striking expression in the relations of England with the Papacy. England had been formerly, of all nations, most loyal in its allegiance to the Pope; but when in 1309 the seat of the Papacy was removed to Avignon, and the holy father himself became a creature of the French king, loyalty to the Pope came into conflict with hatred of France, and the new sentiment of national patriotism proved the stronger. Though the popes of the 'Babylonian captivity' seem not to have been wicked men, they were, at any rate, weak men; and the papal court became a centre of luxury and vice. To support this luxury it became necessary to sell the Church's preferment; and England, where the Church owned in

landed property alone more than one third of the soil of the realm, and received in dues and offerings an income amounting to twice the king's revenue, was a particularly rich field for papal simony. When foreigners, French and Italian, were preferred to the richest livings in England, and proceeded to spend their incomes abroad, the national pride, if not the national conscience, was aroused; and when a French pope, as the last court of appeal in matters of the canon law, set aside the decisions of English courts, the injury to English pride was still deeper. In 1351 was passed the Statute of Provisors, which aimed to stop the first of these abuses, and two years later the Statute of *Præmunire* was directed against the second.

This anti-papal agitation, though purely political in character, could not fail to shake also the religious authority of the Church. A pope who was a Frenchman, and therefore an enemy of England, could not command the full religious loyalty of Englishmen, especially when his court was notorious for its extravagance and profligacy. Not unnaturally the corruption at the head spread through the whole body; and we are unfortunately compelled to believe that the picture of clerical avarice drawn by Chaucer and his contemporaries is but little exaggerated. Though the Church has always taught that the unworthiness of the minister does not vitiate the efficacy of his spiritual ministrations, it was inevitable that even the untutored mind should question the value of an absolution bought with a price from a grasping and unscrupulous priest, and that questioning this, it should question further. If this was not enough, what must have been the consternation of the devout when, in 1378, the great schism of the west began, and Europe beheld two rival popes, each hurling anathemas at the other and at the other's

supporters! Whichever pope you recognized, you were excommunicated by the other; and how was one to tell? England, of course, gave official recognition to Urban VI, the Pope of Rome, while France recognized Clement VII at Avignon; but the prestige of the papal name, and the authority of the Church as a whole, received a crushing blow. The more worldly, like Chaucer, laughed at the whole thing; the more devout either bewailed impotently, like Gower and Langland, the corruption they could not cure, or were driven, like Wiclif, into an open revolt, which was to be the precursor of the Protestant Reformation.

The corruption in the Church and its attendant moral laxity led to corruption in the whole social body. 'If gold rust, what shall iron do?' Chaucer's *Prologue* shows us a world in which avarice and deceit are all but universal, and the Prologue to the *Vision of Piers Plowman* bears witness only less vigorously to the same facts. The world, as Langland sees it, is indeed a 'fair field;' but the laborers are unworthy. His men are wandering in a maze, and everything is going wrong. Here are men at the plow, working hard, playing but seldom. What is the result of their work? They are winning what wasters destroy with gluttony. Pilgrims and palmers go on their journeys; and with what result? They have leave to lie all the rest of their lives. Friars, whose business it is to preach the gospel, gloze it to their own profit. Parsons and parish priests are forsaking their charges to go up to London and sing in chantries at Paul's. Bishops neglect their spiritual duties to take office under the King and count his silver. Gower, too, in the Prologue to his *Confessio Amantis*, reviews the condition of Church and State, and, less vigorously but no less clearly, portrays the same state of things: —

> **Lo, thus tobroke is Cristes folde,**
> **Wherof the flock withoute guide**
> **Devoured is on every side,**
> **In lacke of hem that ben unware**
> **Schepherdes, whiche her wit beware**
> **Upon the world in other halve.**
> **The sharpe pricke instede of salve**
> **Thei usen now, wherof the hele**
> **Thei hurte of that they scholden hele ;**
> **And what schep that is full of wulle,**
> **Upon his back, thei toose and pulle.**

But if the world of fourteenth-century England was sadly out of joint, it was far from being stagnant. In its intellectual ferment the age had much the same character as the age of great Elizabeth. There was the same glow of patriotism and national consciousness consequent upon a series of brilliant victories against a foreign foe ; there was the same spirit of revolt against a foreign church ; and, though the forms of mediævalism still survived, there was at work the same leaven of new ideas and of a new conception of life, reinforced by a new interest in the works of classical antiquity, coming over-seas from Italy ; literature and art was breaking away from the conventional, and, under the influence of new models, was drinking again at the fountain-head of nature. For such periods of restlessness and change have often given birth to great creative literature.

Among a throng of lesser writers who contributed to the literature of fourteenth-century England, five stand out preëminent. There is the nameless author of *Sir Gawayne* and the *Pearl*, who, thoroughly mediæval in his sympathies, infused new life into the old forms of the romance and the vision. There is Langland, who, though a mediæval in his habits of thought, had an independence of judgment, a vigor of expression,

and a strong tinge of democracy, even of socialism, withal, which are essentially modern. There is Gower, at whom it is the fashion nowadays to laugh as ponderous and dull, but who has, nevertheless, a command of language, a mastery of metre, above all a faculty of simple, straightforward story-telling, which are far from contemptible, and which make his *Confessio Amantis*, when taken in small doses, at times really charming. There is the vigorous prose of Wiclif in his sermons and in his translation of the Bible, which is informed with the spirit of modern Protestantism, though tempered, to be sure, with some of the sweetness of mediæval Catholicism. If none of these is an author of the first importance, it is none the less true that nearly two hundred years were to elapse before any other English authors should arise to equal any one of them. Finally, there is Chaucer, the most perfect exponent of his age, who blended in himself both the old and the new, the mediæval and the modern, who not only represents his age, but, transcending its limitations, has become one of the foremost English poets for all time.

CHAPTER II

CHAUCER

If the critic is to pass beyond the study of individual poems, and seek after a comprehensive estimate of a poet's whole work, or if he would wring from a series of writings the secret of the writer's soul, and strive to learn what manner of man he was and by what stages he became what he became, it is a question of the first importance to discover in what order his works were composed, and to determine, whenever possible, at least an approximate date for the composition of each. In the case of more modern authors, in general of those who lived after the invention of printing, the problem is usually solved by a mere inspection of the dates on the title-pages or in the prefaces of their volumes; but with authors like Shakespeare, who avoided publication by printing, and still more with authors like Chaucer, who never heard of the printing-press, the problem is more serious. The investigator must, as in any similar historical inquiry, collect and sift all the obtainable evidence of whatever sort. At times the evidence will consist of references in other books to the work in question; sometimes of allusions in the work itself to historical events of known date; oftener, and evidence of this third sort is least conclusive, and must be used with greatest caution, the argument must be based on the æsthetic qualities of the work itself, on metre, style, and general handling of the theme, which may indicate youth or maturity or decline of the poet's power.

For a few of Chaucer's writings, as, for example, the *Book of the Duchess*, the *Parliament of Fowls*, the *Legend of Good Women*, it is possible to assign approximate dates with a good deal of certainty. From the list of his own works given by Chaucer in the Prologue to the *Legend of Good Women*, we learn that the writings there mentioned were composed at some time earlier than the *Legend*. For the rest we are forced to piece together every available shred of evidence, and construct hypotheses which shall be as plausible as may be. In the succeeding chapters of this book, where Chaucer's writings are considered separately, such evidence and plausible hypotheses as we possess regarding the dates of the several works are considered in detail. The reader will discover that the evidence is often of the flimsiest. It is only necessary here to sum up in the mass what may be determined of the orderly development of Chaucer's art on the basis of the information, more or less trustworthy, which we actually possess.[1]

When it is remembered that the date of Chaucer's birth cannot be later than 1340, and that the earliest of his works for which we can assign a date, the *Book of the Duchess*, was not written till 1369, we are at once impressed with the fact that Chaucer's art was very late in coming to maturity. For the *Book of the Duchess*, though by no means a contemptible work, bears evident marks of youth and immaturity. What was Chaucer doing between 1360 and 1369? To this period it has been customary to assign the *Romaunt of the Rose*, or so much of it as may be considered

[1] The best general study of Chaucerian chronology is the essay by J. Koch, *The Chronology of Chaucer's Writings*, published by the Chaucer Society, London, 1890. Earlier, and therefore less trustworthy, is Ten Brink's *Chaucer: Studien zur Geschichte seiner Entwicklung und zur Chronologie seiner Schriften*, Münster, 1870. Ten Brink's later views on the subject may be found in two articles *Zur Chronologie von Chaucer's*

Chaucer's work; and though this assignment has been questioned,[1] the present writer is inclined to accept it as probable. In this period, too, we may assume, were written those 'balades, roundels, virelayes,' in praise of love, to which Chaucer refers in the *Legend of Good Women*, most of which have doubtless perished. To this general period belongs the *A. B. C.*, and possibly also *The Book of the Lion* and *Origines upon the Maudeleyne*, lost works to which Chaucer refers at the end of the *Parson's Tale* and in the *Legend of Good Women* respectively. During this, the earliest period of his activity, the poet's models were for the most part French. The literary world in which he lived was a world of dream and lovely shadows, of abstractions and graceful conventions, through which his guide was Guillaume de Lorris. The *Book of the Duchess* is a pleasing and charming piece, but not a great poem; excellent as is its poetic execution, there is little to suggest the Chaucer that was to be. Critics have been accustomed to call this period the period of French influence. Like most generalizations, the term is convenient but dangerous. If we keep to the term, and for convenience' sake it is perhaps well that we should, we must be careful to remember that the French influence upon Chaucer does not cease with the close of the so-called French period. The Prologue to the *Legend of Good Women* is thoroughly in the school of Guillaume de Lorris; and in the *Canterbury Tales* the influence of the satirical method of Jean de Meun, the second of the two authors of the *Roman de la Rose*, is evident at every turn. It is the overwhelming pre-

Schriften, in *Englische Studien*, 17. 1–22, 189–200 (1892). The opinions advocated by these earlier students of the subject have been considerably modified by later investigations as to the date of particular poems.

[1] Cf. below, p. 56.

dominance of French influence in this early period which makes the term appropriate.

In 1373 and again in 1378 Chaucer was sent on diplomatic missions to Italy, and came for the first time into vital contact with the great intellectual movement of the early Renaissance. He felt the power of Dante's divine poem; he breathed the atmosphere of humanism which emanated from Petrarch and his circle; he found in Boccaccio a great kindred spirit, an author of keen artistic susceptibility, who in character and temperament had much in common with himself. He found in Italy not only a new set of models, superior in art and in depth of thought to those of France; he received as well a new and powerful intellectual stimulus, which set him to thinking more deeply on the problems of philosophy, and gave him a keener interest in the intricacies of human character. It follows naturally enough that the decade from 1375 to 1385 was one of unwearied literary production. Despite his somewhat arduous duties as an office-holder in the civil service, he found time to produce a series of works which would alone assure him a permanent place in English literature. In the domain of philosophy he made his translation of Boethius on the *Consolation of Philosophy*, one of the half-dozen most popular books during the whole of the Middle Ages, and one which entered very deeply into Chaucer's philosophy of life. Though he was already familiar with the doctrines of Boethius as they are represented in the *Roman de la Rose*, it is hardly to be questioned that the spur to work of this more serious character came to him from his Italian voyages. His newly found interest in human beings as individuals, in the more complex problems of character, bore fruit in his best sustained and most perfect work, *Troilus and Criseyde.*

Here and in the *Parliament of Fowls*, written a year or two later, Chaucer's power as a humorist springs into sudden maturity. To this same period belong, in all probability, the poems which we now know as the tales of the Knight, the Clerk, and the Man of Law. As the first period of the poet's activity has been called the period of French influence, so this second period has been called that of Italian influence. With the same proviso as before, that a great influence once felt never ceases to operate, this term also may be allowed to stand. The influence of Italy was surely preponderant; Boccaccio was the great literary model; the ideals which Petrarch had made current were the guiding principles of life and art.

The transition from this second period to the third and last may be clearly seen in the *House of Fame*. Though the poem betrays evidently enough the influence of Dante and of Boccaccio, and may consequently be assigned to the Italian period, the plot of it is, so far as we know, mainly original. The slighting estimate of Fame, that idol of all Italy, and still more the poet's deliberate decision to turn his back upon the House of Fame, to seek no part with the great philosophers and poets, to satisfy himself with the House of Rumor, where he can hear tidings of men and listen to stories true and false — all this may be taken as a declaration of independence, a determination to strike out for himself into a realm that should be more essentially his own.

To the closing period of Chaucer's art belong his greatest work, the *Canterbury Tales*, begun soon after 1385 and continued intermittently till his death, and the unfinished work which may be thought of as a sort of propædeutic to this, the *Legend of Good Women*, which may safely be dated 1385 or 1386. If we speak

of this as the period of Chaucer's originality, we must carefully define what we mean by the term original. For nearly every tale in the *Legend* and in the *Book of Canterbury* a definite original may be found; nor is the idea of either collection essentially Chaucer's own. Chaucer, like Shakespeare, seldom troubled himself to invent a plot. For a majority, perhaps, of the ideas to be found in these works Chaucer is indebted to 'olde bokes.' The striking difference between this period and the two which preceded is that no single influence is predominant, no single influence save that of the poet's own personality. From the *Roman de la Rose*, from Boethius, from Italy, from ancient Rome, Chaucer borrows at will; but he has ceased to be a pupil, and has become a master. In a sense he is no longer influenced from without; he has absorbed and assimilated and made his own. Thoughts which were once the thoughts of Boethius or Jean de Meun or Boccaccio are now his thoughts. He has included and transcended.

Among the individual authors from whom Chaucer drew the material which he thus took up into himself, four stand out prećminent. They are Boethius, Jean de Meun, Boccaccio, and Ovid. From Boethius he drew the major part of his philosophy, his insistence on a stoical superiority to Fortune and her whims, his interest in the problem of foreknowledge and free-will, his platonic belief that true nobility springs only from greatness of soul. Wherever Chaucer moralizes or philosophizes, the chances are strong that a similar passage may be found in the *Consolation of Philosophy*.[1] To

[1] It must be remembered that the doctrines of Boethius are largely reproduced in the *Roman de la Rose*, and that consequently it is often impossible to determine whether Chaucer is borrowing at first or at second hand. Since Chaucer was intimately acquainted with both works, the question is one of little moment; for he cannot have failed

Jean de Meun, Chaucer's debt is manifold. From him he learned the highly effective satirical method which he uses in the General Prologue to the *Canterbury Tales* and in the prologues of the *Pardoner* and the *Wife of Bath*, from him he borrowed many of his ideas, in particular those which are tinged with radicalism or skepticism; still more important, he seems to have acquired from Jean de Meun that attitude of mind, that habit of thought, which became an integral part of his nature — the habit of looking at life from the standpoint of comedy, that curious blending of easy tolerance and biting sarcasm, which is saved only by the evident kindliness of his soul from the charge of downright cynicism. From Boccaccio and the Italian Renaissance Chaucer received, as we have already seen, an interest in individual humanity, a new and higher standard of artistic form, and a great intellectual stimulus, not to mention the plots of two of his most important compositions. To Ovid, to whose work the philosophical eagle in the *House of Fame* refers as Chaucer's 'owne book,' Chaucer was indebted largely and continuously. 'Altogether,' says Professor Lounsbury, 'Ovid may be called the favorite author of Chaucer in respect to the extent to which the material taken from him was embodied in productions of his own, written at long intervals of time apart, and upon subjects essentially different.'[1] Though Chaucer knew Virgil, and was not unacquainted with other Latin literature, classical antiquity appealed to him most strongly in the pages of Ovid. While drawing from him stories and allusions,

to recognize Boethius as the original source. He was probably not aware of the fact that the work of Boethius is little more than a compendium of the doctrines of earlier philosophers.

[1] *Studies in Chaucer*, 2. 251, 252. The quotation is from the chapter on 'The Learning of Chaucer,' a chapter of which the serious student of Chaucer cannot afford to be ignorant.

Chaucer must have learned also some of Ovid's ease and grace, his power of vivid description, his rich sensuousness of color and form.

Recognizing how great is Chaucer's debt to the work of those who went before him, one is tempted to ask what is left to Chaucer as his own. In one sense, little, in another sense, all. If originality be taken to imply newness, what was never known nor thought before, original minds have been very rare in the world's history, and have seldom expressed themselves in literature and art. The artist is not properly an investigator, a discoverer of truth; his function is rather to select and assimilate, and by new combination of ideas or by new and higher expression, to present the truth with greater cogency and to commend it to the emotions of his audience. He is, however, no mere purveyor of the truth; he, too, must be an original thinker, but original in the sense that he carries back the truth which he has learned to its origin, its fountain-head, in nature itself. Novelty is possible to very few; originality is possible to many. It is not necessary that we should drink from a new river of truth, but that we should drink its waters at the fountain-head, the *origo*, unmixed and unsullied. When Chaucer retells Boccaccio's story of Troilus and his faithless love, he does not merely translate; neither does he paraphrase and adapt. Accepting the plot of the *Filostrato*, he creates the characters anew from his own independent knowledge of human nature, giving to them new sentiments, new motives, impelling them often to new actions, and consequently to new situations. Chaucer's Troilus and Criseyde and Pandarus are as original, perhaps more original, than their prototypes in Boccaccio. So is it when he borrows a thought from Boethius or Jean de Meun. In this sense Chaucer is a great original poet; in this

sense, and in this sense alone, may we assert the originality of Shakespeare. If Chaucer's indebtedness seems greater than Shakespeare's, it is first because the range of his intellect is less universal, and secondly because he drew from a smaller number of sources. We of to-day draw our ideas from such a multitude of writers that our resultant philosophies are mosaics, wherein it is all but impossible to distinguish the origin of this bit and of that; Chaucer had relatively few sources from which to draw, and his indebtedness to each of these is consequently much larger.

Having seen the principal sources whence the poet's ideas were drawn, and the process by which these ideas were made his own, it will not be very difficult to frame some general notion of his ideals and beliefs, of his attitude toward the world about him, of what may be called his philosophy of life. Not that Chaucer ever fashioned for himself a complete and consistent 'system' of philosophy; he was as far as possible removed from any purpose of deliberate didacticism; he was conscious of no burning 'message' to be delivered through the medium of his art; but it is none the less possible to gather from his works a fairly definite idea of his intellectual and spiritual constitution.

If the distinction be indeed legitimate, Chaucer's mind is remarkable rather for its breadth than for its depth, for the extent of its interests rather than for the intensity of its convictions. If Chaucer is not a profound thinker, he is at any rate marked by an eager intellectual curiosity, an openness to ideas, which is evident at all periods of his life. In the domain of science one notices first of all his interest in astronomy and the related pseudo-science of astrology. His works abound in allusions astronomical and astrological. Like Dante and Milton, he prefers to tell his times and

seasons by the great clock of the starry heavens and by the calendar of the zodiac. So minute and definite are these allusions in the majority of cases that we must depend on the professed student of astronomy for their elucidation. From such elucidations we learn that the allusions are not only definite but accurate. The crowning proof of the poet's astronomical attainments is furnished by his *Treatise on the Astrolabe*, written in his later years for the use of 'litel Lowis my sone.' Though his acquaintance with physical science was less extensive, the discourse of the eagle in the *House of Fame* includes an admirable exposition of the theory of the transmission of sound; and a similar perception of scientific principles, though with humorous application, is shown in the concluding episode of the *Summoner's Tale*. That Chaucer had delved somewhat deeply into the mysteries of alchemy is shown by the tale of the Canon's Yeoman. Still another topic, on the borderland of science, in which he betrays a lively interest is the cause and significance of dreams.[1]

In the realm of philosophy and metaphysic there was one problem which had for Chaucer a powerful fascination, the problem of God's foreknowledge and the freedom of man's will. On this topic the disappointed Troilus argues with himself at weary length; on this topic, and on the related topic of man's inability to choose for himself, Arcite discourses in the *Knight's Tale* (A. 1251–1274); to the same topic the *Knight's Tale* reverts near its close in a long speech by Theseus. Some years later Chaucer opened the question again, this time in playful mood, in the tale of the Nun's

[1] This interest, which Chaucer shares with many of his contemporaries, is to be traced to the popularity of Macrobius's commentary on the *Somnium Scipionis* of Cicero. For an account of this work, see below, p. 65.

Priest. Somewhat closely allied with this problem of foreknowledge and predestination is the equally insoluble problem of the existence of evil in a world governed by an all-powerful and benevolent God. It is this problem which troubles the faithful Dorigen in the *Franklin's Tale*, when she contemplates 'thise grisly feendly rokkes blake' which line the coast of Brittany, and threaten shipwreck to her husband returning from over-seas (F. 865–893). With more of bitterness and less of faith, the woeful prisoner, Palamon, vexes the same baffling question in the *Knight's Tale* (A. 1303–1333): —

> Th' answere of this I lete to divynis,
> But wel I woot, that in this world gret pyne is.

Chaucer does not solve these questions — who indeed shall solve them? — neither does he in his discussion of them pass much beyond his master Boethius. What is significant for our purpose is not his answers, for Chaucer is not primarily a philosopher, but the evidence which these discussions bear to his eager intellectual curiosity.

In the poet's attitude towards these various interests of science and metaphysic, in his attitude towards all the interests of life, one plainly discerns a tendency towards skepticism. It is easy to exaggerate this tendency; and some of Chaucer's critics, among them Professor Lounsbury, have laid upon this trait an emphasis which seems to me undue. Nevertheless, the point is not one to be neglected. Interested as he is in astronomy, Chaucer had learned, at least at the time when he wrote the *Franklin's Tale*, to distrust utterly the claims of astrologers and magicians. The magician of the story had a book, —

> Which book spak muchel of the operaciouns,
> Touchinge the eighte and twenty mansiouns

That longen to the mone, and *swich folye,*
As in our dayes is nat worth a flye.[1]

That Chaucer did not take very seriously the claims of the alchemists, the *Canon's Yeoman's Tale* may bear witness. It must be remembered that the majority even of the more intelligent of Chaucer's contemporaries, and of his successors for several generations to come, believed firmly in both of these so-called sciences. Of the supernatural in myth and story, Chaucer makes, of course, large use in his works; and usually he is artist enough to give to the supernatural the air of verisimilitude; but once, at least, when telling in the *Legend of Dido* of the supernatural mist by which Æneas was made invisible on his entrance into Carthage, he feels called upon to screen himself from any charge of undue credulity: —

I can nat seyn if that it be possible,
But Venus hadde him maked invisible, —
Thus seith the book, withouten any lees.[2]

That Chaucer was capable of questioning some of the tenets even of orthodox Christianity, we shall see a little later on.

Coupled with this tendency to skepticism is a noticeable tinge of radicalism. This, again, must not be exaggerated; Chaucer was no revolutionist; he had no desire to subvert the existing order of things, either civil or ecclesiastical. But the speech of the transformed hag at the close of the *Wife of Bath's Tale*, and the balade of *Gentilesse*, betray a strong leaven of democracy, which is further evident in the lively and sympathetic interest in the lower classes shown not infrequently in the *Canterbury Tales*. Even more radical in its

[1] Chaucer expresses a similar opinion in his *Treatise on the Astrolabe*, 2. 4. 58–61: 'Natheles, thise ben observaunces of judicial matiere and rytes of payens, in which my spirit ne hath no feith.'

[2] *Legend*, 1020–1022.

tendency is the discussion of celibacy, that cherished ideal of mediæval Catholicism, found in the *Wife of Bath's Prologue*, and touched on again in the *Monk's Prologue* and in the Epilogue to the *Nun's Priest's Tale*.

Though it has been a comparatively easy matter to discover Chaucer's attitude towards many of the interests of his day, it is difficult, perhaps impossible, to determine with any exactness his attitude towards Christianity and the Catholic Church; for of his inmost convictions and hopes Chaucer, like other modest men, speaks but seldom, and with reserve. We must not be misled, as were the reformers of Henry VIII's time, by the bitterness of Chaucer's attacks on the corruptions of the Church, into classing him with Wiclif as one of the forerunners of the Reformation. A contemporary writer of unquestioned orthodoxy, John Gower, fulminates with equal bitterness, if with less effectiveness, against precisely the same abuses; and Langland, who in his treatment of the clergy is at one with Chaucer and Gower, is always a faithful son of the Church. From a great mass of independent testimony, we are compelled to the belief that Chaucer's picture of wholesale corruption is but little overdrawn. It is entirely conceivable that Chaucer, like Gower, should, while remaining loyal to the Church, deplore its abuses. If Chaucer has shown us unworthy churchmen, has he not also painted, with all apparent sympathy, the portrait of an ideal pastor, the 'povre persoun of a toun'? As regards the vital doctrines of Christianity, Chaucer maintains a discreet silence, from which nothing can be inferred one way or the other. Professor Lounsbury has made much[1] of the opening lines of the Prologue to the *Legend of Good Women*: —

[1] *Studies in Chaucer*, 2. 512. The whole of the section entitled 'Chau-

A thousand tymes have I herd men telle,
That ther is joye in heven, and peyne in helle;
And I acorde wel that hit is so;
But natheles, yit wot I wel also,
That ther nis noon dwelling in this contree,
That either hath in heven or helle ybe,
Ne may of hit non other weyes witen,
But as he hath herd seyd, or founde hit writen.

This Professor Lounsbury considers a skeptical utterance. But taken in the light of its context, the passage is capable of an interpretation directly the opposite. Chaucer is arguing that we must give 'feyth and ful credence' to books, even when they relate things beyond the pale of our personal experience, just as we believe in the joys of heaven and the pains of hell, though no man living has ever tasted of either. Equally inconsequent is any argument drawn from the lines in the *Knight's Tale* which have to do with Arcite's death (A. 2808–2814): —

His spirit chaunged hous, and wente ther,
As I cam never, I can nat tellen wher.
Therfor I stinte, I nam no divinistre;
Of soules finde I nat in this registre,
Ne me ne list thilke opiniouns to telle
Of hem, though that they wryten wher they dwelle.

Chaucer may surely decline to accompany his personages 'through the strait and dreadful pass of death' without being accused of infidelity as to the life beyond. A somewhat stronger case may be made out for Chaucer's doubt as to the efficacy of the absolution granted by the corrupt clergy of his day. After his merciless exposure of the methods of the Summoner in the General Prologue, he says: —

cer's Relations to Religion' deserves careful reading. To the present writer Professor Lounsbury seems to have laid undue emphasis on Chaucer's chance remarks.

> Of cursing oghte ech gilty man him drede —
> For curs wol slee, *right as assoilling saveth.*

This is unquestionably an ironical utterance; but one satirical remark must not be allowed to weigh too heavily, until it has been proved that Chaucer did not write the *Parson's Tale*. The doctrine of transubstantiation, openly combated during Chaucer's lifetime by the reformer Wiclif, the poet nowhere questions.

That Chaucer's mind betrays a tendency towards skepticism, or at least towards criticism, no one will doubt. His restless intellectual curiosity led him to question many things in heaven and earth; and under the influence of the new spirit of the Renaissance, he began no doubt to exercise the 'right of private judgment.' But that he was and remained, in his beliefs and hopes, in all essentials, a Christian and a loyal Catholic, there is no reason to deny and no adequate reason to doubt. Of the essentially religious nature of his character such works as the Boethius translation, the *Parson's Tale*, the Lawyer's tale of Constance, and the Prioress's story of the 'litel clergeon' furnish sufficient proof. The essential rightness of his moral judgment no one familiar with his work can seriously doubt. Some of his work, dealing as it does with flagrant immorality, is of questionable propriety; but with one or two exceptions, there is no attempt to show sin in other than its true light. Even these exceptions are to be explained as due to an excess of the spirit of comedy, rather than to a perverted moral judgment. In the little that we know of Chaucer's life, there is nothing that is inconsistent with the high virtues of 'trouthe and honour, fredom and curteisye,' or with the essentially Christian virtue, humility of heart.

Right as are his moral judgments, quick as he is to perceive evil, Chaucer is never touched by the spirit

of the reformer. He was capable, doubtless, of sympathizing with a Langland or a Wiclif, but he never set himself consciously to further their work. He sees the corruption of the Church, and clearly recognizes the evil of it; but who is he to set the crooked straight? There has been always, since the close of the Golden Age, evil in the world; in one form or another evil will always exist. It is so, apparently, that God made the world. If there is always evil, there is always also good; the worst hypocrites in the *Canterbury Tales* have in them somewhat of good, something even lovable. The good is always admirable; and the evil, though deplorable, is so very amusing. If this is not the best possible world, it is at least the best actual world, the world at any rate in which we must spend our threescore years and ten. Let us cleave to what is good, and laugh good-naturedly at what is evil. Above all, let us keep our hearts kind and tender, lacerated by no *sæva indignatio* at what we cannot cure. In this spirit of kindly tolerance Chaucer looked at the world about him. To the ardent reformer such an attitude as this seems merely base and pusillanimous; but in Chaucer it springs neither from weakness nor indifference, but from quiet conviction. The reformer is necessarily a protestant, a dissenter; Chaucer is essentially a Catholic, his spirit is the Catholic spirit — perhaps it may be shown to be essentially the spirit of Christianity. To the man of truly humble spirit his own importance in the universe seems but small, his own exertions of slight avail. He will live his own life in the world as well as he can. Sedulously removing the beams from his own eyes, he will give to the world whatever of good he can, and see to it that his own small influence be an influence towards righteousness; for the rest, he will leave the salvation of the world in the competent hands of the God

who has created it. Chaucer has said all this himself in what is one of his noblest utterances, the *Balade de Bon Conseyl*, to which has been given the title *Truth*.

> Tempest thee noght al croked to redresse,
> In trust of hir that turneth as a bal:
> Gret reste stant in litel besinesse;
> And eek be war to sporne ageyn an al;
> Stryve noght, as doth the crokke with the wal.
> Daunte thyself, that dauntest otheres dede;
> And trouthe shal delivere, hit is no drede.
>
> That thee is sent, receyve in buxumnesse,
> The wrastling for this worlde axeth a fal.
> Her nis non hoom, her nis but wildernesse;
> Forth, pilgrim, forth! Forth, beste, out of thy stal!
> Know thy contree, look up, thank God of al;
> Hold the hye wey, and lat thy gost thee lede;
> And trouthe shal delivere, hit is no drede.

That is the Catholic spirit; that is the spirit that actuated Chaucer's life. Reformers may rail at this spirit as they please, but they cannot prove that it is weak or base.

One other line from the balade entitled *Truth*, not included in the two stanzas given above, must be quoted for the light which it throws on Chaucer's temper. It is the line with which the poem opens: —

> Flee fro the prees, and dwelle with sothfastnesse.

In the Prologue to *Sir Thopas*, it will be remembered, when the Host calls upon Chaucer to tell his tale, he accuses him of riding ever with his eyes upon the ground, and urges him to approach nearer and look up merrily: —

> 'He semeth elvish by his contenaunce,
> For unto no wight dooth he daliaunce.'

Again, in the *House of Fame*, the eagle says to Chaucer: —

'And noght only fro fer contree,
That ther no tyding comth to thee,
But of thy verray neyghebores,
That dwellen almost at thy dores,
Thou herest neither that ne this.'

The trait to which these passages all point is one highly characteristic of Chaucer's nature, a certain aloofness from the world of men and things. Though keenly interested, he never seems to have felt himself a part of it. To the great peasants' revolt of 1381, the dramatic *dénouement* of which in the streets of London he may well have witnessed with his own eyes, he refers but once, and then only playfully in three lines.[1] Though the battle of Poitiers was fought in Chaucer's lifetime, and though he himself had seen service in the fields of France, he never sings the glory of the English arms. Closely attached as he was to the royal court, he never speaks of the great diplomatic struggle which was being fought out between England and the Pope. Chaucer was living the while in another realm, the realm of fantasy. Not that he felt it necessary, like Wordsworth, to retire to the solitude of some Dove Cottage; fond as he was of wandering in the fields of a May morning, Chaucer would have been quite miserable in Dove Cottage. He lived the major part of his life in London, and held important offices under the Crown. We have every reason to believe that he discharged the duties of these offices faithfully and efficiently. Neither did he close his eyes to things about him; few English poets have observed the ways of men so minutely and so accurately as he. He could be a practical man of affairs, when that was necessary; he was doubtless the most charming of companions over a glass of canary or old sack. But by temperament and choice he held aloof, not an actor but

[1] B. 4584–4586.

a spectator, sympathizing but not sharing in the interests of the world. He was in the world, but not of it; and for this very reason, perhaps, he continues to live when the more active and conspicuous men of his age have become but a shadow and a name.

The intellectual curiosity and openness of mind which mark Chaucer's attitude towards the world in general are equally evident in his more exclusively literary activity. Never a profound scholar,[1] even when measured by the standards of his own day, he was, none the less, an omnivorous reader, and dipped more or less deeply into a great variety of books on widely diverse subjects. Professor Lounsbury has noticed the significant fact that a large number of his citations and allusions are drawn from the earlier pages of a work. In his reading, as in his writing, his curiosity was ever leading him into new courses; after the first flush of interest was spent, he found it hard to hold himself down to the completion of a work begun with all enthusiasm. In his mastery of foreign languages, too, the same trait is discoverable. Though he read Latin, French, and Italian fluently, he is often guilty, when held down to the stricter work of translation, of rather serious blunders. It is but fair to remember, however, that in the absence of adequate lexicons and grammars, strict verbal accuracy was not easy of attainment. Similarly, when we catch him at error in an allusion, it must be remembered that books were not then, as now, readily accessible, and that even a painstaking scholar, which Chaucer certainly was not, was obliged to trust to memory much more than was always safe. Boccaccio, who made much greater pretensions to scholarship than Chaucer, was capable of such

[1] See Professor Lounsbury's chapter on 'The Learning of Chaucer,' *Studies in Chaucer*, 2. 169–426.

a hybrid coinage as *Filostrato*, the title of his Troilus romance, which he took to mean 'laid low by love;' and the ponderously learned Gower was not aware that Tullius and 'Cithero' were one and the same person.[1] In view of this last slip, it may surely be forgiven to Chaucer if he similarly fails to recognize the identity of Iulus and Ascanius.[2] Chaucer's works abound, indeed, with inaccuracies and with shocking anachronisms; but so, for that matter, do the works of Shakespeare. Unfortunately, however, Chaucer has a thoroughly mediæval love of parading his learning. It is one of the few serious blemishes in his art that he cannot refrain from long scholastic digressions, in which he heaps up authority on authority, and even suffers his personages to interrupt a passionate speech with an explanation of some obscure term needlessly introduced.[3]

But if Chaucer, despite his parade of learning, did not read with scholarly thoroughness, he read with the fine discrimination of the literary critic. Nothing can be more untrue to Chaucer than to speak of him, as was long the fashion, as an untutored genius, 'warbling his native wood-notes wild,' attaining his artistic effects by mere happy blunder or lucky intuition. He was a conscious critic of his own work and of the work of others. There is good reason to believe that he began the series of 'tragedies' known to us as the *Monk's Tale*, in all good faith as a serious work of art; but later, when he incorporated the unfinished series into the *Canterbury Tales*, he had already recognized its essential literary badness, and through the mouths of the Host and the Knight conveys his own just criti-

[1] *Confessio Amantis*, 4. 2648; 7. 1588–1698.
[2] *House of Fame*, 177–178.
[3] *Troilus and Criseyde*, 5. 897–899.

cism of the work. Similarly, he was not long in discovering the inherent flaw in the scheme of the *Legend of Good Women*, and abandoning it as a mistaken experiment.[1] The exquisite burlesque of *Sir Thopas* and the Host's common-sense criticism thereon show that he had accurately discerned the literary extravagances of the widely popular romance of chivalry. Still higher proof of his fine literary taste is furnished by the process of selection and rejection, alteration and addition, with which he utilizes the works which serve him as sources for his compositions.

The eclectic character of Chaucer's artistic procedure is strikingly shown in the variety of his experiments in versification. Metrically, to be sure, his range is very limited; he employs normally only the iambic rhythm; and, save in *Sir Thopas*,[2] his measure is always either tetrameter or pentameter, though ample variety is attained by skillful handling of the pauses, by not infrequent substitutions of trochee or dactyl for the normal iambus, by large use of the feminine ending, and by various drawing out of the sense from one verse into another. It is in stanza form that Chaucer experimented widely. Nine tenths or more of his verse composition is in one of three stanzas, — the octosyllabic couplet, characteristic of his earliest or French period, though reappearing in the *House of Fame;* the rime royal, or seven-line stanza of *Troilus and Criseyde*, which belongs in general to the second or Italian period; and the heroic couplet, in which was written his maturest work. The last two of these stanzas, of which the first continued to be widely employed until Shakespeare's youth, and the second is rivaled only by blank

[1] Cf. below, p. 145.

[2] Further exception should, perhaps, be made of two stanzas in *Anelida and Arcite* (lines 272–280, 333–341), where the pentameter is broken up by internal rimes.

verse in use and popularity, Chaucer was the first to introduce into English literature. In his mastery of all three he has never been surpassed. The minor poems display several other stanzas. If the rimes of the seven-line stanza are repeated through three or four successive stanzas, we get the balade form used by Chaucer so effectively in *Truth*, in *Gentilesse*, and in *Lack of Steadfastness*. In the *A. B. C.* and in the *Monk's Tale* appears an eight-line stanza, with rime-scheme *ababbcbc*, which Chaucer apparently abandoned as less pliable than the seven-line stanza of the rime royal. This stanza, with the addition of a final alexandrine riming *c*, becomes the famous Spenserian stanza of the *Faerie Queene*. The *Complaint to His Lady* is little more than an exercise in versification. The poem begins with two stanzas of the rime royal; then shifts into the *terza rima* of Dante, employed here for the first time in English verse, and ends in a ten-line stanza with rime-scheme *aabaabcddc*. The complaint inserted into *Anelida and Arcite* is a highly artificial arrangement of varying stanzas, with strophe and answering antistrophe. Still another artificial form borrowed from France is the triple roundel entitled *Merciles Beaute*, with which should be grouped the charming roundel introduced into the *Parliament of Fowls*. When it is remembered that in some of these artificial verse-forms it is necessary to find twelve words riming with the same sound, and that in a few instances the number is yet greater, Chaucer's mastery of the art of riming is apparent; for seldom are we conscious of any constraint due to the exigencies of rime.

No less remarkable is the breadth and variety of Chaucer's range, when his work is looked at from the standpoint of its content. Preëminently, of course, his

fame rests on his power as a narrator, the power to tell an interesting story supremely well. His narrative method is characterized by straightforward directness and simplicity. Ordinarily, his stories have a single plot, one main thread of interest, which is taken up at the beginning and followed without interruption to the end. This is the method of Boccaccio and of mediæval story-telling in general; it is the method which William Morris adopted in his *Earthly Paradise*. The method of the modern writer of short stories is quite different from this, since his purpose is usually not so much to narrate a series of happenings as to create a single strong impression. His story will not begin at the beginning, and will seldom be conducted to its logical end; it will consist of a series of striking situations, presented not necessarily in their chronological order, with just so much of narrative as may be necessary to bind these situations together and make them understandable. To this modern method Chaucer approximates in the *Pardoner's Tale*, and in lesser measure in the *Knight's Tale*,[1] from which the reader carries away not so much the recollection of a narrative as the vivid memory of a few important scenes. Even when Chaucer clings more closely to the mediæval method of direct narration, he achieves a somewhat similar effect by a subtle shifting of emphasis. If one compares his stories of Virginia and of Constance with their originals, it may be seen how, by the addition of a few skillful touches, the interest of narrative has been subordinated to the strong impression of a noble character. With what admirable skill Chaucer could handle a more complicated plot, in which two independent intrigues are made to furnish each the catastrophe for the other, may be seen in the conduct of the *Miller's Tale*.

[1] Cf. what is said of these tales below, pp. 172, 227–230.

No less brilliant is Chaucer's art in description. From the merry May morning, gay with singing of birds and sounding of the huntsman's horn, in the *Book of the Duchess* to the matchless series of portraits in the Prologue to the *Canterbury Tales*, the vividness and variety of Chaucer's pictures are unsurpassed. It were idle to enumerate them, for the reader's memory will call up a score of unforgettable scenes. What is the *Knight's Tale* but a splendidly pictured tapestry, full of color and motion? Particularly remarkable in these descriptions is their scope and breadth. There is much more of definiteness than of vagueness in Chaucer's descriptive method; yet the mind is seldom wearied with a confusing catalogue of details. A few significant details give exactness to the picture, while suggesting a whole realm of things beyond. It is as though a veil were suddenly withdrawn, letting the scene burst instantly into view. Lowell has called attention to this quality of suggestiveness in the description at the beginning of the *Clerk's Tale*: —

> Ther is, at the west syde of Itaille,
> Doun at the rote of Vesulus the colde,
> A lusty playne, habundant of vitaille,
> Wher many a tour and toun thou mayst biholde,
> That founded were in tyme of fadres olde,
> And many another delitable sighte,
> And Saluces this noble contree highte.

Though not primarily a reflective poet, Chaucer is no less a master in this division of his art. Illustrations may be drawn from among his minor poems, and even more from among the moralizing passages of *Troilus* and the *Canterbury Tales*. The *House of Fame*, too, is essentially a work of reflection, though clothed in the form of an allegorical narrative.

Unfortunately, Chaucer never wrote a drama; but

that he might have been, had the dramatic form been developed in his time, one of the foremost of English dramatists, there can be no manner of doubt. A master of the art of characterization, skillful in his handling of dialogue, delighting in action, and keenly alive to the value of effective situation and climax, above all a master of constructive art, he is a dramatist in all but the fact. Evident in many of the *Canterbury Tales*, and still more manifest in the story of the pilgrimage itself, this dramatic power reaches its fullest expression in *Troilus and Criseyde*, a work which is better dramatically than Shakespeare's play on the same theme. The five books into which the poem is disposed correspond accurately to the five acts of the drama; the action rises to a climax in the third book, and falls to a catastrophe in the fifth. The poem consists of a series of dramatic scenes; and the story is carried forward almost entirely by means of dialogue. The characterization of Criseyde is as subtle as anything in Shakespeare; and Pandarus is hardly less remarkable. In virtue of this work alone, Chaucer has an unquestionable right to be considered as the forerunner of the great dramatic literature of Elizabeth and James.

After considering the range of Chaucer's power in narrative and dramatic art, it is surprising to find how limited is his power as a lyrist. Though in the *Prioress's Tale*, in the Lawyer's tale of Constance, and in the *Book of the Duchess* there is a distinctly lyrical note, Chaucer seldom enters the domain of the lyric proper. The best of his short poems, such as *Truth*, *Gentilesse*, and *The Former Age*, are reflective rather than lyrical, while the love poems, though charming in their way, are too conventional and artificial to touch us deeply. Almost alone in its fresh spontane-

ity, its authentically lyric quality, stands the roundel sung by the choir of birds at the end of the *Parliament of Fowls*. Why this absence of lyric power, it is hard to say. In the age of Elizabeth dramatic and lyric went hand in hand. The fact must merely be recorded as one of the limitations in Chaucer's genius.

The variety and breadth of Chaucer's art shows itself again in his wide register of tone. For illustration one need not go beyond the limits of the *Canterbury Tales*. There is the romantic idealism of the *Knight's Tale* and the high religious idealism of the *Prioress's Tale* side by side with the Zolaesque realism of the Miller and the Reeve. The Wife of Bath's prologue is brutally frank in its realism; her tale is a graceful tale of faerie. The delightful extravaganza of Chanticleer and Partlet is introduced by a realistic *genre* painting of the poor widow's cottage, worthy of Teniers or Gerard Dou. In both of these manners Chaucer seems equally at home. The dominant tone in the *Canterbury Tales*, as in Chaucer's work as a whole, is that of humor; but Chaucer's humor is as protean in its variety as any other of his qualities. It ranges from broad farce and boisterous horse-play in the tales of the Miller and the Summoner to the sly insinuations of the *Knight's Tale* and the infinitely graceful burlesque of *Sir Thopas*. Every intermediate stage between these extremes is represented, the most characteristic mean between the two being found, perhaps, in the tale of the Nun's Priest. The only constant element in Chaucer's humor is its kindliness, its healthiness, its spontaneous freshness.

With a keen sense of humor is usually joined, as in Thackeray and Dickens, a deep susceptibility to the pathetic, and Chaucer is no exception to the rule; but, unlike Dickens and Thackeray, he knows the delicate

line which separates pathos from sentimentality, and over this line he never steps. Troilus as he eagerly watches for the returning form of Cressid, Arcite taking his last leave of his kinsman and his love, Dorigen as she goes to keep her terrible tryst, Constance comforting her little son, Griselda preparing for the wedding feast of the rival who is to supplant her, above all the matchless story of the murdered schoolboy singing his *Alma Redemptoris* — these show the touch of pathos in its purest form, and the list might be indefinitely extended. In any one of these instances a lesser poet would have become sentimental; this Chaucer never becomes.

To the sublimer heights of tragedy, however, Chaucer does not ascend. Though the *Pardoner's Tale* moves us to tragic pity and fear, it does this rather by its accessories, — the dreadful plague, the mysterious veiled figure, the suddenness of its catastrophe, — than by any working out of inevitable moral law. The catastrophe springs, to be sure, from the evil character of the three revelers; but the emphasis is on the external catastrophe itself rather than on the evil character. If the essence of tragedy is spiritual rather than physical catastrophe, the *Pardoner's Tale* must be called supreme melodrama. So near to real tragedy Chaucer never again approaches. There was ample opportunity for tragic handling in *Troilus*, had he so wished; but this opportunity was deliberately declined. There is tragedy enough latent in the poem as it is; but over this the poet passes lightly, preferring to laugh at the comic spectacle of a brave and generous youth and a shrewd cynical worldling, duped, both of them, by a cunning but worthless woman. We must not assume that Chaucer was blind to the tragedy of life or incapable of viewing its problems seriously.

> What is this world ? what asketh men to have ?
> Now with his love, now in his colde grave
> Allone, withouten any companye.

The author of these lines was surely capable of being serious; there are few lines in our literature more pregnant with the tragedy of life. But this note is never long sustained; where possible, it is avoided altogether. Capable of seriousness, Chaucer has deliberately chosen to portray the world through the medium of comedy.

> I woot myself best how I stonde,

are Chaucer's words when he refuses to compete for the favors of Lady Fame. I, for one, am ready to believe that Chaucer knew his own powers best, and am unwilling to quarrel with him for his choice of the comic spirit; for comedy such as his constitutes a 'criticism of life' as true within its limits as that of 'high seriousness' and the 'grand style.'

Of Chaucer's style it will not do to talk at great length, for its quality can be felt much better than it can be analyzed. It is so delicate, indeed, that any elaborate analysis seems in the nature of an impertinence. It is characterized preëminently by its simplicity. Though for his metre's sake the poet affects a slight archaism in the preservation of the final *e*, which was already beginning to disappear, his words are the words of every-day life. His sentences are short and loose, simple in their structure, free from awkward inversions and from any studied balance or antithesis. As his diction is simple, so is his thought. In his later work, at least, there is an almost complete absence of the strained conceits, the far-fetched metaphors, and elaborate puns, which mar much of Shakespeare's work; and this is the more remarkable when one remembers Chaucer's reverence for the authority of

Petrarch. Once in the *Franklin's Tale*, he finds himself betrayed into an overwrought metaphor: —

> For th'orisonte hath reft the sonne his light.

Instead of canceling the line, he lets it stand, and adds: —

> This is as muche to seye as it was night.

To read Chaucer is to listen to the charming, gracious conversation of a cultured gentleman who is also a poet. At times his language is as terse and pregnant as any in Shakespeare. Such is the line in the *Knight's Tale* which shows us

> The smyler with the knyf under the cloke.

But ordinarily he has leisure to give his thought full expression. He has 'the power of diffusion without being diffuse.' His stories tell themselves away without apparent effort, even without apparent art, without hurry, but without delay.

> A povre widwe, somdel stope in age,
> Was whylom dwelling in a narwe cotage,
> Bisyde a grove, stonding in a dale.
> This widwe, of which I telle you my tale —

There is nothing remarkable in these lines; but they are the very essence of literature, and no one can resist their charm.

If Chaucer's style is marked by naturalness and simplicity, let no one suppose that it is a careless style. Artless as his lines seem, they are full of that highest art which effaces itself. In his perfect finish, his unassuming elegance, Chaucer is essentially Gallic, one may almost say Hellenic. With all his simplicity, there is a quiet energy, a sureness of touch, a delicacy of perception, which betray the master mind. Above all, there is in Chaucer's style, as in the man himself,

a sanity and poise, a calm equanimity, which render it peculiarly grateful to the ears of our modern world, wearied with much wild talking.

No one will pretend, I suppose, that Chaucer is a poet of the first rank. He is not a great prophet like Dante, with a burning message which he must deliver; only rarely does he move one's whole emotional and moral nature as does Shakespeare. Though sharing in the fresh spontaneity which makes the Homeric poems a perpetual solace, he has not Homer's majesty; nor does he attain to the dignity and elegance of Virgil. As a comedian he will hardly rank with Cervantes and Molière. In intellect and in art he is inferior to all these; but among poets of the second rank his position is high. In the list of English poets other than Shakespeare, Milton is the only one who may be held to surpass him; and between two men so dissimilar in their powers one will hesitate to determine the preëminence.

The qualities which make for Chaucer's greatness have already been reviewed in the preceding pages, and will be considered again in more detail as they manifest themselves in individual works, in the chapters which follow; but the quality which distinguishes him preëminently is his sanity and poise. With the possible exception of Shakespeare, there is no English poet of power even commensurate with Chaucer's, who is so eminently sane. We are living in an age which is restless, in many respects unhealthy, insane. On one side of us is the dull sway of materialism, commercialism, money-getting; on the other side we still hear the frantic protests of a Carlyle and a Ruskin, the revolutionary rhapsodies of a Byron or a Shelley, we listen to the persistent self-analyses of a Wordsworth or a Coleridge, or to the beautiful but morbid imaginings of a Keats;

or, coming nearer to the present day, we hearken to the strange dreamings of a Maeterlinck or the unsparing iconoclasms of an Ibsen. I would not for a moment be thought insensible to the greatness of these men; I insist merely that with all their varied greatness there is infused a strain which is morbid and unhealthy. The eighteenth century had sanity without poetry; the nineteenth had poetry without sanity; Chaucer, like the great Greeks, combined both.

We turn to Chaucer not primarily for moral guidance and spiritual sustenance, nor yet that our emotions may be deeply and powerfully moved; we turn to him rather for refreshment, that our eyes and ears may be opened anew to the varied interest and beauty of the world around us, that we may come again into healthy living contact with the smiling green earth and with the hearts of men, that we may shake off for a while 'the burthen of the mystery of all this unintelligible world,' and share in the kindly laughter of the gods, that we may breathe the pure, serene air of equanimity.

CHAPTER III

THE ROMAUNT OF THE ROSE

It is thoroughly in accord with what we know of Chaucer's innate modesty that his first serious undertaking in literature should have been a translation rather than an original work; and surely no better exercise than that of translation could have been found to develop a technical mastery of poetic form. The poem which Chaucer chose to translate was the widely popular *Roman de la Rose*, a work which offered a broad and varied scope to the young poet's powers of expression, and was, moreover, thoroughly congenial to his tastes and sympathies.

Though the Chaucerian *Romaunt of the Rose* extends to the no mean length of 7698 lines, it reproduces less than a third of its French original, for the *Roman de la Rose* contains in Méon's edition 22,047 lines of octosyllabic couplets. Of these, lines 1–5169 and 10716–12564 alone are translated. But if the English translation is only a fragment of its original, Chaucer's familiarity with the whole poem, and the influence which it exerted upon him, are so great, that the poem in its entirety is of the first importance to the student of Chaucer's work.

The French Poem.

The *Roman de la Rose* is the work not of a single author, but of two authors, of two successive generations, utterly unlike in their ideals and temperaments. Of the first of these, Guillaume de Lorris, whose work extends to line 4068, we know very little; and for that little we are indebted to the second poet, Jean de Meun,

who continued his work. From the statements of the younger author we are able to calculate that Guillaume must have been born about the year 1200, and that the composition of the poem must have fallen between the years 1225 and 1230. His work is supposed to have been terminated by his early death. Of the place of his birth and of his residence we do not know. The little town of Lorris is a few miles east of Orleans; and Guillaume's name may indicate that as his birthplace; but we cannot be sure. If, as seems probable, he was a clerk, his education may have been received either at Orleans or at Paris. His dialect shows that he lived in the north of France; but in the absence of any critical edition of the *Roman*, it is impossible to be more exact.

Of Jean de Meun, who forty years after Guillaume's death undertook the continuation of his unfinished work, we know somewhat more. Jean Clopinel was born at Meun-sur-Loire, and died before November 6, 1305, on which date his comfortable house in Paris was deeded to the Dominicans of the rue St. Jacques. Since it can be shown from internal evidence that his continuation of the *Roman* was written between 1268 and 1277, M. Langlois fixes on the year 1240 as the approximate date of his birth. From his own statement in another work we learn that his life was an honorable and prosperous one, and that it had been his fortune to serve 'les plus granz genz de France.' He was an excellent scholar, widely read in Latin and French, and the author of several works, among which may be mentioned a translation of the *Consolation of Philosophy* of Boethius, a book to which he is deeply indebted in the *Roman de la Rose*.

Two men more dissimilar in character than the authors of the *Roman* it would be hard to find.

Guillaume is essentially an idealist, a purist, cherishing the fair ideal of Middle Age chivalry, living in a world of dream and shadows. To him love is the great influence which ennobles and purifies the human heart, woman is a superior, well-nigh perfect being, little short of the divine, in whose service man may well expend all in him that is best and highest. His poem is a love story and a courtly treatise on the art of love. Five years and more ago, he tells us, as he lay on his bed one May morning, he dreamed a wondrous dream. In this dream he wandered out through the flowering fields, with the birds singing all about him, and came at last to a great garden all walled about, the garden of love. In the midst of the garden, hard by the fountain of Narcissus, stands a goodly rose tree, on which grows a bud which the poet longs earnestly to pluck. This is the allegorical device by which the poet shadows forth his love for the lady of his desire. The porter at the gate of the garden is Idleness. The *dramatis personæ* are, save the poet himself, such abstractions as Largesse, Fair-Welcome, Evil-Tongue, Jealousy, and Danger, or haughtiness. When allegory is but a literary device, it is always dangerous; but Guillaume thought in terms of allegory, and his allegorical personages, if shadowy, are none the less true and effective. Guillaume de Lorris is not a great poet; but he is a good poet, and one can hardly fail to enjoy the quiet loveliness of his work.

Jean de Meun is of quite a different stamp, so different, indeed, that it seems a mere caprice that he should have undertaken the continuation of such a poem as the *Roman de la Rose*. If Guillaume de Lorris is a conservative and an idealist, Jean de Meun is a realist and a revolutionist. To him the chivalric ideal is mere nonsense. In his democratic creed noble birth is but an

accident; personal worth is the only patent of true nobility. Woman is a vain and fickle creature, a snare for men's feet. Love is but a game played for the prize of sensual gratification. In crossing the line which divides the work of the two authors, the reader plunges into a totally different atmosphere. Jean de Meun has kept to the machinery of Guillaume's poem; the same allegorical personages pass before us; the quest of the rose still remains the ostensible theme of the poem; but the poet uses the framework merely as a device for the introduction of his own ideas. There are long digressions on various topics, philosophical and theological, wearisome because of their prolixity, but excellent in their reasoning, and terse and effective in their diction. There are bitter tirades against the frailty of woman, and merciless attacks against the corruption of the clergy. Jean de Meun's method in his satirical passages is of peculiar interest to the student of Chaucer; for it is the very method so effectively employed in the *Canterbury Tales*. In the person of False-Seeming, one of the most masterful of Jean de Meun's characterizations and the prototype of Chaucer's Friar and Pardoner, a friar himself is made to expose, proudly and boastfully, the iniquities of his order; while in the person of the Duenna, who becomes in Chaucer's hands the genial Wife of Bath, is exhibited all the sensuality and cunning craft which constitutes Jean de Meun's idea of woman.

In Guillaume de Lorris one is conscious of a sweet and noble personality, coupled with a fairly true sense of artistic form and poetical expression. One cannot read a thousand lines of Jean Clopinel without realizing that he has to do with a masterful intellect. His personality is not lovable, but commanding. Unquestionably inferior to Guillaume in artistic form, — for his work seems often a mere hodge-podge of ideas, — he

as unquestionably surpasses him in range and in intellectual scope. For the graceful delicacy of Guillaume's diction, Jean de Meun offers a nervous, incisive, yet polished style, which is as superior to that of Guillaume as is Shakespeare to Spenser.

This strange composite poem exerted in its own century, and in the two centuries following, an enormous influence on the literature of Northern Europe, and no inconsiderable influence south of the Alps. Its wide circulation is attested by the fact that nearly two hundred manuscript copies have survived to the present day, many of which are found in England and in Germany. It was early translated into Flemish and into Italian, while somewhat later appeared the English version which is the subject of this chapter. In France it was kept before the public eye by its bitter antagonists no less than by its enthusiastic admirers. It is hardly an exaggeration to say that for two hundred years no important French author escaped its influence. In England its vogue was little less extensive. Without its suggestion Chaucer would not have been Chaucer, and English literature would have followed a different channel.

The reasons for this widespread popularity and far-reaching influence are not hard to fathom. The *Roman* is not, as is sometimes asserted, a great original creation. Guillaume did not invent the dream-vision form nor the use of allegory, any more than Petrarch invented the sonnet; the revolutionary doctrines of Jean de Meun did not spring unbegotten from his own brain. Those who will take the trouble to read M. Ernest Langlois's monograph[1] on the subject will find that every significant feature of the poem is paralleled in earlier works. The great achievement of Guillaume

[1] *Origines et Sources du Roman de la Rose*, Paris, 1890.

de Lorris and Jean de Meun is that they assimilated and then crystallized into masterful poetic expression a literary form and a set of ideas which were already current and popular. Without Petrarch the sonnet might still have survived as a literary form; but it could hardly have achieved the great vogue which it attained through his authority. It is a general law in literature that widespread and long-continued popularity is possible only when an idea already popular receives permanent expression at the hands of a master. The *Roman de la Rose* was immediately recognized as such a masterpiece, and became the medium through which was effectively transmitted an influence which might otherwise have spent itself ineffectually in a couple of generations. Another source of its wide appeal may be found in the fact of its dual and diverse authorship. The poem took its rise just before the dawn of the Renaissance. During the centuries which immediately followed, two tendencies, the mediæval and the modern, were existing side by side. To those who clung to the old ideals, Guillaume de Lorris made a strong appeal; while the free-thinkers of the Renaissance could not but recognize a kindred soul in Jean de Meun. The poem was wide enough in its scope to appeal to all. Chaucer, for example, who exhibits in his own development the transition from the mediæval to the modern, was first attracted by Guillaume de Lorris, and only later felt the full influence of Jean de Meun.

The chief interest of the *Roman de la Rose* for the modern student lies in this its historical significance as an expression of the varying ideals of the later Middle Ages; but it has its absolute interest as well. Any one who will read the poem through, either in the French original or in the excellent English translation by Mr.

F. S. Ellis,[1] will find many passages of vivid and charming description, of keen analysis, of telling satire, of much vital human interest, and of true literary power, to repay him for the many hours which even a hurried reading will demand.[2]

The English translation of the *Roman de la Rose*, which is preserved in a single manuscript in the Hunterian collection at Glasgow, was first included among Chaucer's works in Thynne's edition of 1532,[3] and was until 1870 universally accepted as a genuine work of Chaucer. Since that date the question of its authenticity has been one of the most vexed problems of Chaucerian scholarship; and even to-day scholars are not in full accord as to the solution. The English Version.

That Chaucer made a translation of some portion at least of the *Roman*, we know on Chaucer's own authority. In the Prologue to the *Legend of Good Women* (B version, 328–331), the god of love says to Chaucer: —

> For in pleyn text, withouten nede of glose,
> Thou hast translated the Romaunce of the Rose,
> That is an heresye ageyns my lawe,
> And makest wyse folk fro me withdrawe.[4]

[1] London, 1900. (The Temple Classics Series, J. M. Dent & Co. 3 vols.)

[2] The best editions of the French text are those of M. Méon, Paris, 1814, and F. Michel, Paris, 1864. A new edition, which will doubtless supersede these, is promised by M. Ernest Langlois. The best literary study of the *Roman* is that by M. Langlois in the second volume of *Histoire de la Langue et de la Littérature française*, published under the direction of M. Petit de Julleville, Paris, 1896. Shorter and less detailed, but highly suggestive, is the chapter devoted to the *Roman* in *La Littérature française au Moyen Age*, by Gaston Paris, Paris, 1890. Reference has been made in a previous note to M. Langlois's *Origines et Sources du Roman de la Rose*, Paris, 1890.

[3] Thynne printed from a manuscript now lost, which, though somewhat more accurate than the Hunterian MS., does not differ markedly from it.

[4] Lydgate, moreover, in the *Fall of Princes*, mentions the translation among other works of Chaucer: —

Two questions at once suggest themselves: Did Chaucer ever complete his translation? Is the fragmentary translation which we possess the work of Chaucer? The first of these questions may be pretty safely answered in the negative. In the first place, the translation of so long a poem is a laborious and tedious task; and Chaucer, as we well know, was only too likely to weary of an undertaking before it was half completed. In the second place, had so popular a poet as Chaucer completed a translation of so popular a poem as the *Roman de la Rose*, it is highly improbable that the work would have been allowed to perish.[1]

The first scholar to raise the second question, that as to Chaucer's authorship of the existing English version, was the late Professor F. J. Child of Harvard, in a communication to the *Athenæum* for December 3, 1870: 'I may add, that it will take a great deal more than the fact that the *Romaunt of the Rose* is printed in old editions, to make me believe that it is Chaucer's. The rhymes are not his, and the style is not his, unless he changed both extraordinarily as he got on in life. The translation is often in a high degree slovenly. The part after the break, from v. 5814 on, seemed to me, on a recent comparison with the French, better done than the middle; and as the Bialacoil of the earlier portion is here called Fair-welcomyng, *perhaps* this part belongs to a different version.'

Professor Child did not pursue the question any further; and it was several years before any detailed argu-

> And notably [he] did his businesse
> By great auise his wittes to dispose,
> To translate the *Romaynt of the Rose.*
>
> Quoted by Skeat, 1. 23.

[1] It is, perhaps, worthy of remark that the *Romaunt of the Rose* is not mentioned in the list of works of evil tendency which Chaucer repents of having written in the 'retractation' at the end of the *Parson's Tale.*

ment against the Chaucerian authorship appeared in print. It was nearly twenty years before the important hint contained in his last sentence received further elaboration. The first important document in the controversy appeared from the pen of Skeat in 1880,[1] in which the argument against Chaucer's authorship of the translation is based mainly on three grounds: (1) The presence in the translation of imperfect rimes, particularly the riming of words ending in -y with words ending in -ye, such as do not appear in the poet's unquestioned works; (2) the occurrence of words which belong distinctly to a dialect more northern than that of Chaucer; (3) differences in the vocabulary of the translation from the vocabulary of Chaucer.[2]

Though the argument against Chaucer's authorship of the translation did not pass unchallenged,[3] nothing more of importance appeared till 1888, when it was clearly proved that Child had been right in suspecting that the portion of the translation which follows the break at line 5810 is not by the author of the earlier portion.[4]

[1] *Chaucer's Prioress's Tale*, etc., third edition, Oxford, 1880. The essay is reprinted in the Chaucer Society's volume of *Essays on Chaucer*, pp. 439–451. That the question had already been discussed is shown by Thomas Arnold's communication to *The Academy*, July 20, 1878, pp. 66, 67, and Skeat's answer, *The Academy*, August 10, 1878, p. 143.

[2] Of these arguments, the third is least sound. Cf. an article by Professor Cook in *Modern Language Notes*, 2. 143–146 (1887).

[3] The most important dissenting voice was that of Fick in *Englische Studien*, 9. 161–167 (1886), who argued that the impure rimes and northern forms were to be explained on the ground that the translation was a work of Chaucer's youth.

[4] F. Lindner in *Englische Studien*, 11. 163–173. The argument is based on rime, on the change from Bialacoil to Fair-welcomyng, noticed by Child, and on a number of false translations in the second part. Lindner is not ready to attribute either section to Chaucer, but favors the first rather than the second. His article is in many particulars invalidated by the more thorough investigations of Kaluza. (See below.) In a review of Kaluza's work in *Englische Studien*, 18. 104–105, Lindner

In the years 1892 and 1893 the controversy reached its culmination. In his *Studies in Chaucer*,[1] published in 1892, Professor Lounsbury combated stoutly and at great length the arguments against Chaucer's authorship of the whole translation; and in the same year he was ably answered by Professor Kittredge.[2] In the year following, 1893, the whole question was put upon a new footing, and all preceding arguments were in a measure invalidated by Professor Kaluza.[3] It is unnecessary to reproduce here in detail Kaluza's arguments, which a serious student of the question will read for himself; his conclusions alone need detain us. He has shown conclusively that the existing *Romaunt of the Rose* consists, not, as Child guessed and Lindner proved, of two dissimilar fragments, but of three. The first (Fragment A), including lines 1–1705, contains nothing in rime, dialect, or vocabulary to prevent its attribution to Chaucer. The second (Fragment B), lines 1705–5810, is much less faithful in its following of the French text, and includes within its limits nearly all of the false rimes and northern forms which had led earlier scholars to reject the whole translation. Fragment C, lines 5811 to end, returns in method of translation and in style to the manner of Fragment A,

gracefully admits his errors, and assents fully to Kaluza's position. See Skeat's communication to *The Academy* for September 8, 1888, pp. 153, 154.

[1] Vol. ii, pp. 3–166. Professor Lounsbury has never retreated from the position here maintained. He is, as far as the present writer knows, the only scholar who still asserts the Chaucerian authorship of the whole translation.

[2] *Harvard Studies and Notes in Philology and Literature*, 1. 1–65. See also Skeat in *The Academy* for February 27, 1892, pp. 206, 207.

[3] *Chaucer und der Rosenroman*, Berlin, 1893. Kaluza had previously communicated his discoveries to Furnivall, who in turn communicated them to *The Academy* for July 5, 1890, p. 11. See also Skeat's communications to the same paper for July 19, 1890 (pp. 51, 52), and August 15, 1891 (p. 137).

and contains only a small number of questionable rimes and forms. Dr. Kaluza reaches the conclusion that Fragments A and C are the work of Chaucer, and that Fragment B is the work of an unknown poet of northern dialect, who, imitating as well as he could the manner of Chaucer, set himself to complete Chaucer's unfinished work.[1] The main contentions of Kaluza's study have been pretty generally accepted; and most scholars now agree that Fragment A is by Chaucer, and that Fragment B certainly is not. About Fragment C there is still much dispute, Professor Skeat declining to accept it as Chaucer's.[2] The present writer is inclined to agree with Kaluza in thinking it genuine.[3]

It may be held as fairly certain, then, that, intimate as was Chaucer's acquaintance with the whole of the *Roman de la Rose*, and great as was the influence it exerted upon him, he executed but a small part of his projected translation of the work, and that his unfinished version was later continued by some poet of Chaucer's school.

It remains to ask at what period of his career Chaucer's fragmentary translation was made. While the whole of the existing translation was held as Chaucer's work, its imperfect rimes led students to attribute it

[1] In *Essays on Chaucer*, published by the Chaucer Society, pp. 675–683, Skeat assigns the dialect of Fragment B to 'some county not far from the Humber, as Lancashire, Yorkshire, or Lincolnshire.' The date of the fragment he thinks to be later than 1400 and earlier than 1440. It has recently been urged by J. H. Lange in *Englische Studien*, 29. 397–405 (1901), that the author of Fragment B is Chaucer's disciple Lydgate. The argument is plausible, but not conclusive. Skeat has shown (*Athenæum*, June 6, 1896, p. 747) that Lydgate was acquainted with Fragment A.

[2] *Oxford Chaucer*, 1. 1–20.

[3] The latest attempt to prove Chaucer's authorship for the *whole* translation is that of Miss Louise Pound in *Modern Language Notes*, 11. 92–102 (1896). The argument, which is based on the sentence-length in Chaucer's genuine poems and in the *Romaunt*, is hardly convincing.

to the earliest period of the poet's activity. When, on the other hand, the whole work was considered spurious, this argument ceased to operate, and the fact that the *Romaunt* is mentioned in the Prologue to the *Legend of Good Women* in close association with the *Troilus* led Ten Brink to the conclusion that Chaucer's supposedly lost translation belonged to a period only slightly earlier than his *Troilus*.[1] To this conclusion Kaluza also assents.[2] Though the question probably is not capable of final proof, the present writer is inclined to hold to the earlier view, that Chaucer's translation belongs to the period of his youth. Though the portions of the work which may be attributed to Chaucer are of a high degree of excellence, easy and spirited,[3] they have not the power of his maturer work. The translation is a good one, but not a great one. There are, moreover, in Fragment C at least, a number of imperfect rimes that can be accepted as Chaucer's only on the assumption that the work is immature. Finally, it seems inherently more probable that an undertaking of this character should belong to the period of the poet's apprenticeship rather than to that of his developed art.[4] The association of the work with *Troilus* may be sufficiently explained as due to the similarity in the spirit of the two works.[5]

[1] *History of English Literature* (Eng. trans.), 2. 76, 77; and *Englische Studien*, 17. 9, 10.

[2] *Chaucer und der Rosenroman*, 1, 2.

[3] The first 1678 lines of the French poem are reprinted from Méon's edition in Skeat's *Oxford Chaucer*, 1. 93–164, parallel with Chaucer's version. The student is thus enabled to make his own comparisons between original and translation. The English version is but 27 lines longer than the French.

[4] Skeat, apparently, continues to regard the *Romaunt* as an early work. Cf. the *Oxford Chaucer*, 1. 11.

[5] For the date of the *Romaunt*, see also Koch's *The Chronology of Chaucer's Writings* (Chaucer Society), pp. 12–15.

CHAPTER IV

THE MINOR POEMS

THOUGH among the Minor Poems of Chaucer are numbered many of his latest as well as of his earliest productions, it is convenient to treat of them together in a single chapter. Nor is the departure from the chronological method which such treatment involves without its compensating advantages; for in their variety of theme and tone, and even more in their wide metrical range, they constitute an excellent introduction to Chaucer's longer and more sustained compositions. In the following pages the Minor Poems are considered severally in the approximately chronological order adopted in Professor Skeat's edition.

I. AN A. B. C.

Chaucer's *A. B. C.*, a 'song according to the order of the letters of the alphabet,' is merely a translation, as literal as the exigencies of rime and rhythm would permit, of a hymn to the Virgin included in *La Pèlerinage de la Vie Humaine* of Guillaume de Deguilleville, 'a Cistercian monk in the royal abbey of Chalis,' written about the year 1330. Of the date of Chaucer's translation we have no certain knowledge; but from the choice of subject and the manner of execution, it is safe to infer that it is among the poet's earliest works. It is merely a meritorious essay in verse composition. The introductory statement in Speght's Chaucer of 1602, where the *A. B. C.* was first printed, to the effect that it was made, 'as some say, at the

Request of Blanch, Duchesse of Lancaster, as a praier for her priuat vse, being a woman in her religion very deuout,' is not supported by any other evidence. The verse is iambic pentameter; the stanza contains eight lines, with the rime-scheme *ababbcbc*. The stanza of Chaucer's original contains twelve lines of octosyllabic verse, with only two rimes.

II. THE COMPLAINT TO PITY

The love-lorn squire, Aurelius, in the *Franklin's Tale*, tried to ease his heart by making 'manye layes, songes, *compleintes*, roundels, virelayes;' and, apparently, in his younger days, Chaucer had done the same. Whether the unhappy love expressed in the 'complaint' and described again at the beginning of the *Book of the Duchess* was a real and deep passion or not, we have no way of knowing. Don Quixote, when he would make himself a knight-errant complete, provided himself with a Dulcinea del Toboso whom he might serve as lady-love; and it is quite possible that when Chaucer would launch himself as a courtly poet, he found it expedient to do the same. Still we must not assume the truth of such a hypothesis merely because the expression of this love is clothed in artificial and conventional forms. Personally, I find the idea of a hopeless love, protracted through eight long years, out of harmony with the eminent sanity of Chaucer's nature. But who shall say?

We do not know the date of the *Complaint to Pity*, nor do we know whether or not it was original with Chaucer.[1] It is a conventional love poem on the French model, and is in all probability one of Chaucer's earliest extant works. It is interesting chiefly as

[1] Professor Skeat's attempt to find a parallel for the personification of Pity in the *Thebais* of Statius seems unnecessary.

being probably the earliest appearance in English verse of the seven-line stanza, with rime-scheme *ababbcc*, known as the rime-royal, which was later used in *Troilus and Criseyde*.

III. THE BOOK OF THE DUCHESS

The *Book of the Duchess*, or the 'Deeth of Blaunche the Duchesse,' as it is called in the Prologue to the *Legend of Good Women*, is the first of Chaucer's poems to which a definite date can be assigned. In September, 1369, died the Lady Blanche, daughter of Henry, Duke of Lancaster, and first wife of Chaucer's patron, John of Gaunt; and soon after her death, we may suppose, was written the poem which celebrates her virtue and bewails her loss. John of Gaunt and his lady were both twenty-nine years old; and if we accept the year 1340 as the approximate date of Chaucer's birth, this also was the age of the poet. Twenty-nine he was at least, perhaps older, so that if this be his first original work of any length, — and its immaturity lends credence to the belief, — Chaucer's genius was slow in its development. Keats, we remember, was but twenty-six when death took him away. Date and Sources.

Chaucer's literary apprenticeship was worked out in the school of the *Roman de la Rose*, his translation of the poem being very likely his first serious venture into the field of letters; and the *Book of the Duchess*, like other work of his earliest period, is strongly under the influence of the allegorical love poetry of France. From that source, directly or indirectly, comes the whole machinery of the poem, its dream and vision, its singing birds, its flowery meads; from the same source are drawn some of the ideas also. Were not the walls of the chamber in which the poet dreamed that he awoke

Peynted, bothe text and glose,
Of al the Romaunce of the Rose?

Of the same school of poetry is the Frenchman, Guillaume de Machault (1300?–1377), and from him, too, Chaucer has borrowed here and there.[1] Machault's *Dit de la Fontaine Amoureuse*, which Chaucer certainly knew, contains a long paraphrase of the story of Ceyx and Alcyone; and it has been asserted that this suggested the Proem of the *Book of the Duchess*.[2] It is quite likely that Chaucer did consult Machault's version of the story; but it is clearly demonstrable that he also went directly to Ovid, and that he is more indebted to the Latin than to the French. Though the general spirit of the *Book of the Duchess* is of the French school, its plot, if it may be said to have a plot, is Chaucer's own. Of its 1334 lines, not more than a hundred have been traced to a definite French original.[3]

It is possible that the story of Ceyx and Alcyone was originally an independent work. In the Prologue of the *Man of Law's Tale*, at any rate, we read that

In youthe he made of Ceys and Alcion;

but this may very well refer to the *Book of the Duchess*, which, as we know, was made in Chaucer's youth.

It is as a work of the poet's youth, a mark from which one may measure his subsequent literary development, that the *Book of the Duchess* deserves attention. Intrinsically its value is but slight. It is not lacking in beautiful and effective passages;

Literary Art.

[1] See Sandras, *Étude sur G. Chaucer*, 291–294.

[2] The significant portions of the *Dit de la Fontaine Amoureuse* are given by Ten Brink, *Studien*, 197–205. Ovid's version is found in *Metamorphoses*, 11. 410–748.

[3] Cf. Lounsbury's *Studies in Chaucer*, 2. 212.

but, taken as a whole, it furnishes but weary reading. Distinctly graceful and pleasing is the story of Ceyx and Alcyone, when judged purely on its own merits as an imitation of Ovid; but so slight is its connection with the main theme of the poem, that it constitutes a serious breach of artistic unity. By far the most charming passage of the whole work is the account of the poet's supposed awakening, with the merry singing of the birds without the pictured windows of his chamber broken by the sudden blast of the huntsman's horn, all the varied life and motion of the hunt, the flowers and trees and wild beasts of the greenwood. It is not till the lonely knight begins to speak that the poem sinks to its true level of mediocrity. Not only are his speeches intolerably long, they are also essentially artificial. If he may be forgiven his conventional diatribe against malicious fortune, and his strange conceit of the game of chess, features borrowed from Machault, it is hard to overlook his unintermitted pedantry. He ransacks the treasure-house of classical antiquity, and the Bible as well, to furnish forth fit comparisons for his loss, and, not content with this, stops now and then to explain a more recondite allusion. He tells how he had made many songs to win his lady's love: —

> Althogh I coude not make so wel
> Songes, ne knowe the art al,
> As coude Lamekes sone Tubal,
> That fond out first the art of songe;
> For, as his brothers hamers ronge
> Upon his anvelt up and doun,
> Therof he took the firste soun;
> But Grekes seyn, Pictagoras,
> That he the firste finder was
> Of the art; Aurora telleth so,
> But therof no fors, of hem two.

It is Chaucer, of course, and not the bereaved knight, who is thus jealous of his reputation for philological accuracy. 'But therof no fors, of hem two;' it is in either case a serious lapse from literary taste. Lapses of this sort Chaucer never wholly outgrew.

In passing judgment so harshly on the long speeches of the knight, some exception must be made for the passage in which he describes the charms, spiritual as well as physical, of the 'gode faire Whyte.' Of this Lowell has spoken as 'one of the most beautiful portraits of a woman that was ever drawn.' 'Full of life it is,' he continues, 'and of graceful health, with no romantic hectic or sentimental languish. It is such a figure as you would never look for in a ballroom, but might expect to meet in the dewy woods, just after sunrise, when you were hunting for late violets.'[1] But even here one is tempted to cry out on the score of prolixity.

Some attempt is made to create a sort of suspense by withholding till the very end the fact that the knight's loss of his lady is the irreparable loss of death; and after the long-drawn-out speeches of the poem, a distinctly striking effect is produced by the abruptness of the end, with its utter restraint: —

> 'She is deed!' 'Nay!' 'Yis, by my trouthe!'
> 'Is that your los? by God, hit is routhe!'

I cannot agree with the majority of critics who see in this ending proof that Chaucer tired of his work and ended the poem hastily; it seems to me rather a stroke of deliberate art.

In its lack of good proportion and its frequent lapses in taste, in the occasional roughness of metre which suggests the earlier alliterative line, in its lack of humor and delicate irony, — for which, to be sure, there is little opportunity, — we see that the *Book of the Duchess*

[1] *Conversations on some of the Old Poets*, p. 98.

stands at the beginning of Chaucer's development. In its graceful treatment of nature, its well-managed transitions, its skillful use of dialogue, in its portrait of noble womanhood and its occasional pathos, it gives promise of the splendid development to come.

IV. THE COMPLAINT OF MARS

The *Complaint of Mars* is a conventional poem, supposed to be sung by a bird on St. Valentine's Day, in which mythology and astronomy are curiously blent together to the greater glory of illicit love. There is nothing to indicate the date of its composition, nor have we any certain knowledge whether or not it was intended to celebrate an actual intrigue; though the old copyist, Shirley, appended to his manuscript copy of the piece the statement that some men say that it was made about my Lady of York, daughter to the King of Spain, and my Lord Huntingdon, sometime Duke of Exeter. The lady named was sister-in-law to Chaucer's patron, John of Gaunt, while my Lord Huntingdon afterwards married John of Gaunt's daughter, Elizabeth. Shirley further assures us in his heading to the poem that it was made at John of Gaunt's command. The *Complaint* has little claim to attention save for the fact that a somewhat difficult nine-line stanza is handled with a good deal of skill.

V. THE PARLIAMENT OF FOWLS

On the twentieth day after Christmas, in January, 1382, King Richard was married in the chapel of the palace at Westminster to the Lady Anne of Bohemia, a daughter of the Emperor Charles IV and a sister of Wenceslaus, King of Bohemia, 'who at this period had taken the title of Emperor of Rome.' Richard was but fifteen years old, and his bride was

Date.

but a few months his senior. For upwards of a year, Froissart tells us, Richard had been in treaty with King Wenceslaus, and the Lady Anne had been previously contracted to two German princes; so that the course of this diplomatic courtship had not been a very smooth one.

Though we cannot assert the fact with positive assurance, it seems very probable that it is the events of this royal courtship which Chaucer celebrates allegorically in his *Parliament of Fowls*. The 'formel egle,' which Nature holds on her hand, —

> Of shap the gentileste
> That ever she among hir werkes fonde,
> The most benigne and the goodlieste, —

would then represent the Lady Anne. The 'tercel egle,' 'the foul royal,' who declares his love for her, would stand for Richard, while the other two eagles, 'of lower kinde,' would be the two earlier suitors. The year of respite which Dame Nature grants, in which the 'formel egle' is to choose between her suitors, corresponds with the period over which the diplomatic negotiations were protracted. Chaucer is evidently celebrating a courtship in high life, and no other courtship of the period so well accords with the incidents of the poem. The maturity of Chaucer's literary art in the poem, furthermore, agrees very well with a date as late as 1382. That it cannot have been written later than 1385 is proved by the mention of it in the Prologue to the *Legend of Good Women*. It is not at all impossible that the delicate flattery of the *Parliament of Fowls* may have been directly responsible for the favor which Queen Anne showed to Chaucer three years later.[1]

Though its general form as a poem of the dream-

[1] Cf. p. 141.

vision type associates the *Parliament of Fowls* with the essentially mediæval, French models of Chaucer's earlier period, such as the *Romaunt of the Rose*, and though the conception of an assembly of fowls is probably of French origin,[1] the poem shows overwhelming proof of the influence of the new culture which came to Chaucer as a result of his Italian journeys of 1373 and 1378. Sources.

After four introductory stanzas, Chaucer devotes fifty-six lines to a synopsis of Cicero's *Somnium Scipionis*, which he was reading before he fell asleep and dreamed his dream. This work, a part of the *De Republica*, was not known to Chaucer and to his contemporaries in its original setting, for the *De Republica* was not recovered till a later date, but was preserved as an extract in a copious commentary of Macrobius, a grammarian and philosopher of the fifth century. This book was a very popular one with Chaucer and with the Middle Ages in general, and exerted no small influence on the *Divine Comedy* of Dante. The extract from Cicero, if not the laborious commentary of Macrobius, is fully worthy of the popularity it achieved.

In the section which follows on the synopsis of the *Somnium Scipionis*, the predominant influence is that of Dante, from whom the inscription over the gate to the garden of love is freely adapted; though one stanza, beginning with the line, —

> The wery hunter, slepinge in his bed, —

is translated from the late Latin poet Claudian. For the description of the garden and its delights (lines 176–294) Chaucer is closely indebted to the *Teseide* of Boccaccio. It was at about this time, apparently, that

[1] As Skeat has noticed, one of the fables of Marie de France is entitled 'Li parlemens des Oiseax por faire Roi.' *Oxford Chaucer*, 1. 75.

Chaucer wrote his *Palamon and Arcite*, known to us as the *Knight's Tale;* and finding that the stanzas of the *Teseide* here utilized were not necessary for his longer work, he thriftily turned them to account in the *Parliament of Fowls*.

The description of the Goddess Nature surrounded by all the birds of the air is adapted, as Chaucer himself tells us, from the *De Planctu Naturæ* of Alanus de Insulis, a Latin poet and divine of the twelfth century. In Alanus, however, the birds are merely depicted on the robe which Nature wears. As for the parliament itself, with its long debate, which constitutes the real substance of the poem, that is, so far as we know, Chaucer's own original production.

As the sources of the poem show a twofold influence, that of the departing Middle Age and that of the new Italian culture, so too in its literary workmanship one may detect the transition from the more conventional poetry of Chaucer's earlier period to the work of his maturer genius. Structurally considered, the work is far from perfect; for the real action of the piece does not begin till nearly three hundred lines have rolled melodiously by. Beautiful as is the description of the garden of love, its length is both relatively and absolutely extravagant. Quite unnecessary to the action is the synopsis of the *Somnium Scipionis* with which the poem begins, an unfortunate bit of introductory machinery which Chaucer also employs, at greater length, in his earlier *Book of the Duchess*.

Literary Art.

It is not till Chaucer has finished his introductions, and has left his authors well behind him, that the conventional gives place to the natural, and the poet's genius plays freely. The graceful and charming conceit of Dame Nature on her hill of flowers, with all the birds

about her come to choose their mates, is well executed and well sustained. If we fail to enter with much enthusiasm into the emotions of the three rival eagles as they plead their amorous causes, we are at any rate highly entertained by the varying counsels of the four estates in this feathered parliament.

The birds of prey, who constitute the peers of the realm, take the matter quite seriously. If necessary, they are willing to see in the dispute fit cause for war. The fowls of lower degree, the *bourgeois* birds who feed on worms, the mercantile birds who occupy their business in the water, those of agricultural pursuit who feed on seeds, care more for their own well-being and for the expeditious transaction of business than for any punctilio of honor.

> But she wol love him, lat him love another !

cries the unsentimental goose, as spokesman for the water-fowl, while the cuckoo, of the worm-eating estate, goes even further : —

> 'So I,' quod he, 'may have my make in pees,
> I recche not how longe that ye stryve ;
> Lat ech of hem be soleyn al hir lyve.'

From these radical views the turtle dove, representing the more poetical class of those who feed on seeds, is inclined to dissent : —

> Yet let him serve hir ever, til he be deed,

an opinion which the duck considers merely laughable.

Though characterized quite humanly, Chaucer does not suffer us to forget that the parliament is only one of fowls, and the sudden 'Kek, kek ! kukkow, quek, quek' which breaks upon us serves as a delicious bit of humorous realism, after the passionate speeches of the three tercel eagles. As in its general structure the

Parliament of Fowls leads us to comparisons with the *Book of the Duchess* which preceded it, so in its treatment of birds who speak like men it leads us forward to the more finished art of the *Nun's Priest's Tale.*

VI. A COMPLAINT TO HIS LADY

Chaucer's *Complaint to his Lady* is apparently no more than a series of experiments in verse form. Beginning with two stanzas of seven lines, it shifts into the *terza rima* of Dante, and thence into a complex stanza of ten lines, with rime-scheme *aabaabcddc*. This is the first appearance of the *terza rima* in English verse, and probably its only appearance until English literature was again Italianized in the days of Wyatt and Surrey. As Mr. Heath suggests, the poem should not be taken too seriously.[1] It may have been written shortly after Chaucer's Italian journey of 1373.

VII. ANELIDA AND ARCITE

The fragment of *Anelida and Arcite* consists of a Proem of three stanzas, twenty-seven stanzas of seven lines each of the 'Story,' followed by a Complaint in fourteen stanzas of very elaborate metrical construction. After the Complaint, the 'Story' is resumed, but is broken off after a single stanza. Probably the work was never completed.

In line 21 Chaucer gives as his sources 'Stace, and after him Corinne.' Stanzas 4–7 are indeed from the *Thebais* of Statius; but who 'Corinne' may be, we do not know, — very likely the name is one of Chaucer's sheer inventions, — nor do we know any source for the story. But for six stanzas of the poem (1–3, 8–10) a source is easily discoverable. They are taken from the first and second books of Boccaccio's *Teseide*, the

[1] *Globe Chaucer*, p. xxxvii.

poem which served as the foundation of the *Knight's Tale*. Since stanzas from the *Teseide* are also found in the *Parliament of Fowls* and in *Troilus*, it is natural to infer that these three poems were written at about the same time, when Chaucer was busy with his *Palamon and Arcite*, later known as the *Knight's Tale;* that is, soon after the year 1380.

Since the poem is a mere fragment, it is not possible to say much of its literary qualities, save to call attention to the metrical skill and pleasing effect of the Complaint which is incorporated into it. Neither can we, while in ignorance of its source, venture to guess how the story would have been concluded. Though also a Theban at the court of Theseus, the Arcite of this poem has nothing to do with the Arcite of the *Knight's Tale*. It is not impossible that Chaucer may have intended to celebrate some love story of the English court, and that being busy with the *Teseide*, he chose to shadow forth his real personages under names borrowed from the court of Theseus, inventing the name *Corinne* to increase the obscurity of his allegory. Fragment as it is, the piece gives unquestioned proof of Chaucer's power.

VIII. CHAUCER'S WORDS UNTO ADAM

I know no better way to illustrate Chaucer's half-serious, half-playful address to his copyist, than by quoting the words of Petrarch to a friend to whom he wished to send a copy of his own work on the *Life of Solitude:* 'I have tried ten times and more to have it copied in such a way that, even if the style should not please either the ears or the mind, the eyes might yet be gratified by the form of the letters. But the faithfulness and industry of the copyists, of whom I am constantly complaining and with which you are familiar, have, in

spite of all my earnest efforts, frustrated my wishes. These fellows are verily the plague of noble minds. What I have just said must seem incredible. A work written in a few months cannot be copied in so many years! The trouble and discouragement involved in the case of more important books is obvious. . . . Such is the ignorance, laziness, or arrogance of these fellows, that, strange as it may seem, they do not reproduce what you give them, but write out something quite different.'[1]

One may assume that the poem was written soon after *Troilus* and *Boece*, which it mentions in the second line. It is written in the seven-line stanza of *Troilus*.

IX. THE FORMER AGE

Poets have always been ready to sing the praises of long ago, and to Chaucer, living in an age of continual warfare, of corruption and oppression, the 'blisful lyf, paisible and swete, led by the peples in the former age,' may well have appealed very strongly. Doubtless he was wise enough and practical enough to see the fallacies of a general 'return to nature,' and to recognize that civilization has brought its blessings as well as its curses; but he was also philosopher enough to see that 'covetyse' was really at the bottom of all the most serious evils of his day, as it is of our own. The poem is founded on the fifth metre of the second book of Boethius's *Consolation of Philosophy*, and may profitably be compared with Chaucer's prose translation of the same passage. About twenty lines of *The Former Age* are directly taken from Boethius, while the remainder are Chaucer's own expansion of the theme. There is nothing to indicate the date of its composition.

[1] Robinson and Rolfe, *Petrarch, the First Modern Scholar and Man of Letters*, New York, 1899, pp. 27, 28.

The stanza consists of eight lines, with rime-scheme *ababbcbc*.

X. FORTUNE

Because the poem called *Fortune*, like *The Former Age*, is little more than a restatement of the teachings of Boethius,[1] it must not be inferred that it is a mere literary *tour de force*. Indirectly at first through the *Roman de la Rose*, and later from the *Consolation of Philosophy* itself, Chaucer assimilated the philosophy of Boethius into his own soul, and made it the guiding principle of his life. Trite though they be, the thoughts expressed in *Fortune* are noble thoughts; and they are nobly spoken forth, not only with art, but with conviction. Fortune may govern all things with her fickleness, but 'man is man and master of his fate.' Not only may a true man defy Fortune, he may learn from her frowns which of his friends are friends indeed, which things in life are really enduring. Before the poem closes, its stoicism becomes a Christian stoicism. The very uncertainty of things terrestrial, which we, 'ful of lewednesse,' call Fortune, is but part of the scheme of righteous Providence: —

> The hevene hath propretee of sikernesse,
> This world hath ever resteles travayle;
> Thy laste day is end of myn intresse:
> In general, this reule may nat fayle.

Whether the poem was called forth by some particular reverse of fortune or not cannot be known; but the definiteness of the refrain, —

> And eek thou hast thy beste frend alyve, —

and of the appeal to certain princes in the envoy, seems to suggest that this may have been the case. But who

[1] Cf. Boethius, Book II, Proses 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 8, and Metre 1. Here and there the influence of Boethius seems to be at second hand through the *Roman de la Rose*. See Skeat's notes, *Oxford Chaucer*, 1. 542–547.

the friend may be, and what the occasion, it were idle to inquire.

Apart from the nobility of its thought and the elevation of its language, the poem is remarkable for the metrical skill which it betrays. The poem consists of three balades and an envoy. Each of the balades has three stanzas of eight lines each, with the rime-scheme *ababbcbc*, and the rimes are identical in each of the three stanzas; so that the rime 'b' is repeated twelve times, while the rimes 'a' and 'c' appear six times each; yet there is scarcely a line in which one is conscious of any conflict between versification and thought.

XI. MERCILESS BEAUTY

In the Prologue to the *Legend of Good Women*, it is said that Chaucer made many a hymn for love's holidays, —

> That highten Balades, *Roundels*, Virelayes.

The roundel is a highly elaborate verse form, borrowed from France. The stanza contains thirteen lines, with rime-scheme *abbababababbb*, in which lines one and two are repeated as lines six and seven, and are again repeated with line three to form the last three lines of the stanza. The three roundels of this poem and the one near the end of the *Parliament of Fowls* are the only roundels of Chaucer preserved to us. *Merciless Beauty* is a charmingly graceful, but entirely conventional, love poem, after the French school, and perhaps imitated from a French original.[1]

XII. TO ROSEMOUNDE

The balade *To Rosemounde* was discovered by Professor Skeat in 1891, appended to a manuscript of *Troilus and Criseyde* in the Bodleian Library. This

[1] See Skeat, *Oxford Chaucer*, 1. 548.

may indicate that it was written at the same time as the longer poem; but whenever written, it breathes the same spirit of mingled seriousness and irony. It is thoroughly characteristic of Chaucer's developed art. There are three stanzas of eight lines each, with rime-scheme *ababbcbc*, the rimes of the first stanza being repeated in the second and third.

XIII. TRUTH

The balade of *Truth* is the best answer one may give to the charge that Chaucer was incapable of 'high seriousness.' Though suggested in part by Boethius, the poem is essentially original, and expresses, I think, the substance of Chaucer's criticism of life. Like Langland and Wiclif, Chaucer was fully conscious of the evils of his time; nor was he, as one might hastily infer from the humorous treatment of these evils in the *Canterbury Tales*, indifferent to their gravity. When Jacques invites Orlando to sit down and 'rail against our mistress the world, and all our misery,' Orlando answers: 'I will chide no breather in the world but myself, against whom I know most faults.' Orlando's attitude seems to have been Shakespeare's attitude, as it was certainly Chaucer's. 'Werk wel thyself, that other folk canst rede.' The world is bad, but who am I, to set it right? the poet asks. Shall I not merely fill my own soul with storm and tempest, and all the while be striving 'as doth the crokke with the wal'? The poet is gifted with a delicate and sensitive soul, which, kept untainted, can give forth life and beauty to his own age and to the ages in store. To spend it all in mad protest against a wicked world — what shall it profit? Fleeing from the press, renouncing the 'strenuous life' to dwell with truth, Chaucer showed his age its true likeness, its good and evil. The world

might listen or not, as it pleased. After all there is a power stronger than we, making for righteousness: —

> Daunte thyself, that dauntest otheres dede;
> *And trouthe shal delivere, hit is no drede.*

But beyond all this, what is this world that we should struggle so to set it straight?

> Her nis non hoom, her nis but wildernesse:
> Forth, pilgrim, forth! Forth, beste, out of thy stal!
> Know thy contree, look up, thank God of al;
> Hold the hye wey, and lat thy gost thee lede;
> And trouthe shal delivere, hit is no drede.

The poem consists of three stanzas and an envoy, all in the seven-line stanza, with the same rimes reappearing in each stanza and in the envoy.[1]

XIV. GENTILESSE

Though borrowed in its general conception, like *Truth*, from Boethius, and in part also from the *Roman de la Rose*, the balade of *Gentilesse* expresses Chaucer's own conviction as to true gentility, a conviction which is expressed again in the *Wife of Bath's Tale*. Trite enough in a democratic age like the present, these thoughts were more novel in the day of Chaucer, particularly when they came from one who dwelt near the court, that great centre of all the 'solemn plausibilities' of life. There are three seven-line stanzas, with rimes repeated throughout.

XV. LACK OF STEADFASTNESS

If the philosophy of 'Flee fro the prees' be accepted as representing Chaucer's true conviction, it is not surprising to find that he very seldom assumes the prophet's mantle, and attempts to scourge, save with the lash of comedy, the evils and abuses of his time. One of the

[1] For further remarks on this poem, cf. above, pp. 29, 30.

few exceptions to this rule is the vigorous balade, with its envoy to King Richard, entitled *Lack of Steadfastness*. Covetise and the love of meed, the 'lust that folk have in dissensioun,' the decay of virtue and of mercy — these are the evils which are bringing the world to naught; and in this opinion Chaucer is at one with Langland, with Wiclif, and with Gower.

To assign even an approximate date for the composition of the poem is very difficult. In the Tanner manuscript of the minor poems it is headed with the words: 'Balade Royal made by oure laureal poete of Albyon in hees laste yeeres.' Following this hint, Chaucerian scholars have generally assigned it to the years between 1393 and 1399, during which Richard succeeded in alienating the loyalty and affection of most of his subjects. Mr. Pollard, however, suggests, with a good deal of reason, that from a dependent of the court such advice to his sovereign would have been prudent only at an earlier period, in 1389 perhaps, 'when the young Richard was taking the government into his own hands, and throwing over the tutelage of his guardian uncles with the support of all his people's hopes.'[1]

Professor Skeat asserts that the general idea of the poem was taken from Boethius, Book II, Metre 8; but the indebtedness, if any, was very slight. The poem is essentially original. The metre is the same as that of *Truth*.

XVI. ENVOY TO SCOGAN

The date of the playful *Envoy to Scogan* may, perhaps, be determined by the allusion in the second stanza to 'this deluge of pestilence,' which has been interpreted as a reference to the unusually heavy rains which, according to Stowe's *Annales*, fell in the autumn of 1393. 'Such abundance of water fell in

[1] Preface to the Globe Edition, p. xlix.

October, that at Bury in Suffolke the church was full of water, and at Newmarket it bare downe walles of houses, so that men and women hardly escaped drowning.'[1] This deluge, Chaucer suggests, was due to the tears of Venus shed over Scogan's impiety in love. The date 1393 would agree, moreover, with the closing stanza, in which Chaucer speaks of himself 'in solitarie wilderness' at the mouth of the Thames, that is at Greenwich, whither he had been dispatched in 1390 on a commission to repair the banks of the river. That the poem was written in Chaucer's later years is evident from his humorous mention of those 'that ben hore and rounde of shape,' in the number of whom he includes himself.

Of Scogan we know little. He is probably the Henry Scogan, Squire, who was later tutor to the sons of Henry IV. In a balade of his own, written, Professor Skeat thinks, 'not many years before 1413,' Scogan refers to Chaucer as 'my maistre Chaucier,' and proceeds to quote entire Chaucer's balade of *Gentilesse*. There are six stanzas and an envoy, all in the seven-line stanza. The rimes in each stanza are different.

XVII. ENVOY TO BUKTON

The date of the thoroughly characteristic *Envoy to Bukton* is determined by the allusion in line 23 to the undesirability of being taken prisoner in Friesland, whither a company of English was dispatched in August, 1396, to the aid of William of Hainault.[2] A late date is further indicated by the reference to the Wife of Bath. Of Bukton we know only that a Peter de Buketon was the king's escheator for the County of

[1] *Oxford Chaucer*, 1. 557.

[2] See Froissart's *Chronicles*, Book IV, chap. 78. In the preceding chapter we read that 'The Frieslanders are a people void of honor and understanding, and show mercy to none who fall in their way.'

York in 1397. Apparently, Bukton was meditating a second marriage. Chaucer's sound advice on the subject, which seems to be at least half serious, need not be taken as proof that his own marriage had been particularly unhappy. It is clear, however, that Chaucer, now a widower, had no intention of falling again into 'swich dotage' if he could help it. There are three stanzas and an envoy of eight lines each, with rime-scheme *ababbcbc*.

XVIII. THE COMPLAINT OF VENUS

The *Complaint of Venus* consists of three balades, loosely joined together, and supplemented by an envoy. As Chaucer himself tells us in the envoy, the balades are translated from the French of Sir Otes de Graunsoun, a poet of Savoy, contemporary with Chaucer. As may be learned from a comparison with the French text, which is printed in Skeat's *Oxford Chaucer*,[1] the translation does not 'folowe word by word,' but is rather free. Since this complaint is associated in many copies with the *Complaint of Mars*, it has been assumed that the princess addressed in the envoy is the Princess Isabel of Spain and Duchess of York, whose love is celebrated in the earlier piece. If this be true, the date of composition will fall between 1390 and 1394; for in the latter year Princess Isabel died, and in the envoy Chaucer speaks of himself as already dulled by old age. The poem, which is of the conventional type, is chiefly interesting for its elaborate rime-scheme, admirably handled. Each of the three balades consists of three eight-line stanzas, riming *ababbccb*, with repeated rimes. The envoy has ten lines, riming *aabaabbaab*.

[1] 1. 400–404. See also the articles on Graunsoun by Dr. A. Piaget, who first discovered the French originals, in *Romania*, 19. 237–259, 403–448.

XIX. THE COMPLAINT OF CHAUCER TO HIS EMPTY PURSE

This delightful poem, which with delicate humor applies the conventional language of amorous poetry to an empty purse, is probably among Chaucer's latest compositions. The envoy, at any rate, addressed to Henry IV as 'conquerour of Brutes Albioun,' cannot have been written earlier than September 30, 1399, when Parliament formally acknowledged, by 'free eleccioun,' Henry's right to the throne. It is, of course, possible that the preceding stanzas had been written at an earlier time. It is pleasant to know that this delicate appeal for help met with almost immediate reply. On October 3 Chaucer received an additional pension grant of forty marks from the royal treasury. There are three seven-line stanzas, with repeated rimes, and an envoy of five lines, riming *aabba*.

XX. PROVERBS

The two Proverbs attributed to Chaucer by the manuscripts are not of sufficient value to merit any discussion. Each proverb contains four octosyllabic lines, riming *abab*.

XXI. AGAINST WOMEN UNCONSTANT

Though there is no sufficient external evidence to prove this poem one of Chaucer's, it is so thoroughly Chaucerian in manner, and withal so charming and graceful, that one is strongly inclined to think that the manuscripts and the early editions are right in associating it with his genuine work. The idea of the poem and its refrain are from the French of Machault, an author with whom Chaucer was thoroughly familiar. The metre is Chaucer's favorite seven-line stanza, with repeated rimes.

XXII. AN AMOROUS COMPLAINT

As in the case of the preceding poem, there is no satisfactory evidence that *An Amorous Complaint* is by Chaucer, though it is certainly in his manner. The poem has not sufficient excellence to make the question an important one. The seven-line stanza is employed.

XXIII. A BALADE OF COMPLAINT

This poem, like the preceding, is of the conventional erotic type. It occurs in but one manuscript, and is not there attributed to Chaucer. Though superior to *An Amorous Complaint* in art, it is not a poem which we need consider very seriously. There are three seven-line stanzas, without repetition of rime. The accidental recurrence of the *c* rime of the first stanza as the *a* rime of the second is a metrical blemish which may be taken as an argument against its Chaucerian authorship.

XXIV. WOMANLY NOBLESSE

This poem, which is found in a single manuscript, was first printed by Professor Skeat in *The Athenæum* for June 9, 1894. If not deserving of the high praise bestowed upon it by Professor Skeat in the first flush of discovery, it is yet a charming and graceful bit of conventional love poetry. The rime-scheme is highly elaborate, but three rimes appearing in the entire piece. There are three stanzas of nine lines each, riming *aabaabbaa*, with repeated rimes, and an envoy of six lines riming *ababaa*, in which the same rimes again appear. The *a* rime is therefore repeated twenty-two times. It should be noticed, however, that Chaucer has prudently chosen very easy rimes.

CHAPTER V

BOETHIUS AND THE ASTROLABE

BOETHIUS DE CONSOLATIONE PHILOSOPHIE

DURING the whole extent of the Middle Ages there was no single work, save the Bible itself, which exerted so wide and continuous an influence on the thought of Europe as the dialogue of Boethius on the *Consolation of Philosophy*. In England its influence may be traced from the very dawn of our literature; for the moralizing interpolations in *Beowulf* are in several instances to be traced to this source, and the *De Consolatione* was among the works which the great Alfred gave to his countrymen, translated into their own speech. Chaucer, as has already been seen, was permeated through and through with the teachings of Boethius, and his contemporaries felt this influence as strongly. What is true of England is true also of France and Italy and Germany. The direct influence of Boethius, moreover, was supplemented by an indirect influence, exerting itself through the channels of other books, notably of the *Roman de la Rose*. Through this channel, not improbably, Chaucer first met the doctrines of Boethius; and it is not impossible that the idea of Chaucer's translation was first suggested by a couplet of the *Roman*: —

The Original.

> 'T would redound
> Greatly to that man's praise who should
> Translate that book with masterhood.[1]

[1] Ellis's translation, ll. 5344–5346.

Jean de Meun, at any rate, followed his own advice, and made a translation of the book into French.

The work fully deserved the popularity it attained, both in virtue of its inherent excellence and charm, and in virtue of the fascinatingly romantic life of its author. Additional authority was given to it by the tradition, now strongly questioned but never satisfactorily refuted, that its author was a Christian, and by the erroneous belief that he gave his life, a martyr for the true faith. Two or three centuries after his death, he was canonized as St. Severinus.

Anicius Manlius Severinus Boethius was born between the years 475 and 483 A. D., probably later than 480, and died in 524, his life falling in the exciting days of Odoacer and Theodoric. His family was one of high standing, which had for six centuries held office in the public service; his father, who died in the philosopher's boyhood, had been prefect of the city, prætorian prefect, and consul. Boethius married the daughter of his kinsman and guardian, Symmachus, a senator, and himself sat in the Senate. In the year 510 he was elected sole consul through the favor of Theodoric. In 522 the philosopher's two sons were made consuls together.

Though participating in affairs of state, Boethius's highest efforts were given to his books. His education was of the best, and his wide attainments included a knowledge of Greek. 'He translated the works of Pythagoras on music, of Ptolemy on astromomy, of Nichomachus on arithmetic, of Euclid on geometry, of Archimedes on mechanics. Finally, he sought to bring the whole of Greek speculative science within the range of Roman readers; and though he did not live to see the attainment of his ambition, he managed to give to the world in something less than twenty years, of which several were absorbed in the discharge of public duties,

more than thirty books of commentary on, and translation of, Aristotle.'[1]

From this life of distinguished service, Boethius was snatched by a sudden tragic catastrophe. The Senate was suspected by Theodoric of a treasonable intent to restore the ancient liberties of Rome; and Boethius was chosen as the one to bear the full brunt of the royal displeasure. Out of the mouths of notorious false witnesses, as Boethius insists, he was convicted of treason, was imprisoned at Pavia, and, after a long imprisonment, was put to death. It was during this period of imprisonment that he wrote the *Consolation of Philosophy*.

This, the latest and greatest of Boethius's writings, is a dialogue between the author and the goodly lady Philosophy, in alternating sections of prose and verse, wherein are discussed those great problems of human life which were brought vividly to the author's consciousness by his sudden and overwhelming misfortune, coming as it did close on the heels of his highest prosperity. In briefest outline, the argument runs as follows: As Boethius bewails in prison the wretchedness that has come upon him, suddenly appears to him the majestic figure of Philosophy. 'When all the universe is ordered by God,' the prisoner asks, 'why should man alone wander at will?' Philosophy, in her reply, asserts the absolute omnipotence of God (Book I). It is not right to blame Fortune for our woes, for none of the gifts of Fortune are really valuable. Fortune really benefits man only when she frowns upon him, thus teaching him what is the true good (Book II). What, then, is this true good? It must include within itself all the partial goods for which various men strive;

[1] H. F. Stewart, *Boethius, an Essay*, Edinburgh and London, 1891, p. 26. This volume of 279 pages may be most enthusiastically recommended to any one who wishes to know more of Boethius and of his philosophy.

and this absolute and perfect good, the sum of all partial goods, is God himself. Since all men instinctively seek happiness, and since happiness consists only in the true good, all men naturally seek God (Book III). But if God is the supreme good and is omnipotent, why do the wicked flourish? To this world-old question Philosophy answers in the spirit of Plato, that the wicked are not really powerful, that properly they do not even exist at all. They are no part of God, and God alone really exists. God, in his omnipotence, rules the world by his providence, Fate being merely his minister, the actual working out of his providence. Chance does not exist at all (Book IV). But if God's providence rules all things, what room is left for the free will of man? To God, who is the only eternal, superior to the accident of time, all things, past, present, and future, lie open in an 'everlasting now;' and all these things, being patent to his foreknowledge, have been ordered by him into a divine harmony. But to man, living under the condition of time, seeing only the past and present, blind to the future, there is at the moment a real freedom of choice. God foresees, but does not predestine; yet, since his foreknowledge is infallible, he overrules, not the choice, but the consequences of the choice. Thus the freedom of man's will is not inconsistent with God's overruling government (Book V).

The philosophy of the *Consolation*, though not untouched by Christian influence, is essentially pagan, an eclectic blending of Plato (and the Neo-Platonists) with Aristotle and the Stoics. Boethius is indeed the 'last of the Romans.' Noble and exalted as is the spirit which informs the dialogue, the consolation sought and received is not the consolation of the Christian; it is not a matter of faith, but of reason. It is curious that the subtle theological intellect of the Middle Ages

should have numbered its author among the 'noble army' of Christian martyrs and saints.

The Translation.

Though the original suggestion may have come, perhaps, from the couplet of the *Roman de la Rose* quoted above, it was from Chaucer's Italian journeys, and from the intellectual stimulus to more serious literary labor derived from them, that the impetus came which set him to the task of translating the *Consolation of Philosophy* into English. The precise date of the translation, however, we do not know. It is included in the list of the poet's works given in the Prologue to the *Legend of Good Women*, and must, therefore, be assigned to a date earlier than 1386. It probably falls later than the second Italian voyage of 1378. Because of the close association of the translation with *Troilus and Criseyde*,[1] it has been assumed that the two works were executed at about the same time, that is, about the year 1380.

Chaucer made his translation directly from the Latin, using a manuscript supplied with numerous explanatory glosses, which he translated and incorporated into his text. There is no adequate support for the assumption frequently made[2] that he availed himself of the French translation attributed to Jean de Meun. Chaucer probably read Latin as easily as he read French; though his lack of any accurate scholarly acquaintance with Latin syntax is proved by not infrequent blunders, some of them rather serious.[3] As for the style of the translation, Chaucer is never at his ease in prose composition. 'We can here see as clearly as in any work of the Middle Ages what a high cultivation is requisite for the production of a good prose. Verse, and not

[1] Cf. below, p. 91.

[2] Globe Edition of Chaucer, p. xl.

[3] See Stewart, op. cit., pp. 222–225, and the *Oxford Chaucer*, 2. xxiv-xxvii.

prose, is the natural vehicle for the expression of every language in its infancy, and it is certainly not in prose that Chaucer's genius shows to best advantage. The restrictions of metre were indeed to him as silken fetters, while the freedom of prose only served to embarrass him; just as a bird that has been born and bred in captivity, whose traditions are all domestic, finds itself at a sad loss when it escapes from its cage and has to fall back on its own resources for sustenance. In reading "Boece," we have often, as it were, to pause and look on while Chaucer has a desperate wrestle with a tough sentence; but though now he may appear to be down, with a victorious knee upon him, next moment he is on his feet again, disclaiming defeat in a gloss which makes us doubt whether his adversary had so much the best of it after all. But such strenuous endeavor, even when it is crowned with success, is strange in a writer, one of whose chief charms is the delightful ease, the complete absence of effort, with which he says his best things. It is only necessary to compare the passages of Boethius in the prose version with the same when they reappear in the poems, to realize how much better they look in their verse dress. . . . It is to be regretted that Chaucer did not do for all the *metra* of the "Consolation" what he did for the fifth of the second book. A solitary gem like "The Former Age" makes us long for a whole set.'[1]

A TREATISE ON THE ASTROLABE

An astrolabe is 'an obsolete astronomical instrument of different forms, used for taking the altitude of the sun or stars, and for the solution of other problems in astronomy.' Chaucer's Treatise is an attempt to expound 'under ful lighte rewles and naked wordes in

[1] F. Stewart, op. cit., pp. 227, 228.

English,' the uses of the instrument and the elements of astronomy and astrology, for the benefit of 'litel Lowis my sone,' who had attained the 'tendre age of ten yeer.' As outlined in the Prologue, the work was to have consisted of five parts; but of these only the first and part of the second were completed. As the 'yeer of oure lord 1391, the 12 day of March' is twice used[1] as an example in the 'conclusions' of Part II, it is reasonable to assume that the year 1391 is the date of composition. Chaucer makes no claim to originality in his work: 'I ne usurpe nat to have founde this werk of my labour or of myn engyn. I nam but a lewd compilatour of the labour of olde Astrologiens, and have hit translated in myn English only for thy doctrine; and with this swerd shal I sleen envye.' Professor Skeat has shown that the 'old astrologien' from whom Chaucer has drawn the great bulk of his material is a Latin translation of a treatise by Messahala, an Arabian astronomer who flourished towards the end of the eighth century, entitled *Compositio et Operatio Astrolabie.* As the tables were to be calculated 'aftur the latitude of Oxenford,' it has been assumed that little Lewis was a student in the Oxford schools; beyond this we know nothing whatever about him, and it is not unlikely that he may have died before reaching manhood. Since the work has no literary value save that of clear exposition, and since the modern reader is little likely to attempt its perusal, it is not necessary to discuss it further, except to call attention to the charming character of the introductory sentences addressed by the author to his little son.[2]

[1] 2. 1. 6 and 2. 3. 18.

[2] The treatise has been edited by Mr. A. E. Brae, London, 1870, and again in 1872 by Professor Skeat for the Chaucer Society. Skeat's observations are repeated, in condensed form, in the *Oxford Chaucer*, 3. lvii-lxxx.

CHAPTER VI

TROILUS AND CRISEYDE

Of all the works which belong to Chaucer's second period, in which the influence of Italy is preponderant, none is so characteristic of his genius as *Troilus and Criseyde*. In mastery of constructive art, in its spirit of dramatic objectiveness, above all in its psychological portrayal of complex individual characters, it breathes the spirit of the Renaissance, and must be considered the forerunner of the great Elizabethan drama. In some ways it is Chaucer's masterpiece; for it is the only work of large dimensions, requiring a sustained effort of the poetical imagination, which the poet brought to completion. It is not, however, a poem which appeals strongly to the modern reader at a first perusal. Considering its great length, the work is deficient in action; though the background is filled with a number of minor characters thoroughly well portrayed, the vital interest centres in three persons, and events happen very slowly. Moreover, the very nature of the story, as conceived by Chaucer, prevents us from entering into intimate sympathy with any of the *dramatis personæ*. Troilus alone is possessed of really admirable qualities; and with his extravagances we are, as Chaucer intended we should be, frequently disgusted. Finally, it cannot be denied that the manner is profuse to the point of prolixity.

To read the poem aright, one must approach it in the spirit in which Chaucer approached it, looking not for action and rapid development of plot, but delight-

ing in keen, minute, humorous portrayal of character. It is with this single aim of character analysis that Chaucer has allowed the action to move slowly, and has permitted the speeches to prolong themselves, often to weary length. When the reader has grasped the underlying purpose of the poem, and has allowed himself to be fascinated by the baffling problems of character which it presents, he will cease to be impatient at the slowness of its progress or bored by the prolixity of its speeches, and will look eagerly in every stanza for subtle revelations of character and motive. Though the poem would probably be more effective had it been somewhat condensed, it is none the less true that from beginning to end there is hardly a stanza which may fairly be accused of irrelevancy.

Only less remarkable than its keen analysis of character is the constructive art which the poem displays, an art which is in the highest sense of the word dramatic. This aspect of *Troilus and Criseyde* has been presented with admirable discernment by the late Professor Price of Columbia, and with the reader's permission I shall quote at some length from his essay.[1]

'Chaucer, in this poem, is dramatic, not because he allows action to predominate or run riot in his work, but because he deduces action, with profound psychological skill, from the working of emotion. He is dramatic because he makes his characters live before us, in their feeling and their thought, by minute and delicate touches of observation, with almost perfect dramatic force. He is dramatic because, with intense realism of effect, he has made each spoken word of each character, and each action of each character, how-

[1] 'Troilus and Criseyde, a Study in Chaucer's Method of Narrative Construction,' *Publications of the Modern Language Association of America*, 11. 307–322 (1896).

ever trivial in itself, spring as inevitable necessity, by force of the circumstances that he has invented, from the soul of the character that he has imagined. And, in the highest sense of all, Chaucer in this poem is dramatic, because, in tracing the emotional life of his chief characters, he has led that play of passion to its final expression in definite action, because he has created a definite dramatic problem and a definite dramatic solution, and because he has bound all the parts of the action together, with unsurpassable dramatic skill, into a definite dramatic unity. . . .

'Chaucer, I find, has arranged all the action into a sequence of fifty (50) scenes. In connecting these scenes, he makes use of link-passages that are either his own reflections on the story, or else the points of narration or description that are needful for the understanding of the purely dramatic parts. All the fifty scenes are essentially dramatic. In some, indeed, as, for example, the scene of the opening action in the temple, or the dinner scene in the palace of Deiphobus, or the supper scene in the palace of Pandar, with the pouring of the rainstorm that forces Criseyde to spend the night in such deadly peril, Chaucer so far indulges his imagination as to give us the loveliest pictures of the environments of action. But, in general, the mere romance of external situation is indicated very briefly, and all the force of the scene is expended upon the play of emotion, as revealed in the speeches and behavior of the acting persons. In their emotional character, these fifty scenes render almost every phase of human feeling. In many there is the exquisite tone of high comedy; so, for example, the scene in which the stiff fingers of Troilus are moved to compose his first love letter, and the tricks by which Pandar wheedles Criseyde into

receiving and answering it. And then the tone of comedy is kindled by the touch of intense feeling, and made serious by the anguish of suppressed emotion; so the great scene in which heart-broken Criseyde, masking her own grief, entertains her lady friends, and listens to their gossip, at what may be called a Trojan afternoon tea. But in many scenes there is the complete relinquishment of all comic effect, and the complete attainment of the most passionate emotion. The scene, for example, in which Criseyde yields herself, little by little, to the passion of Troilus, and the piteous scenes in which, under the pressure of hostile influences, she falls a prey to the artful and unscrupulous seductions of Diomede are, in their revelation of human feeling, of the highest dramatic force. Each scene in its own place has, with one exception, its own special fitness, its own inevitable function. Each one, in its proper sequence, is firmly knit with the past and with the future of the story. And, in their incessant shifting of emotional tone, they prove the power of Chaucer to deal, in dramatic fashion, with all the range of human feeling, with all the aspects of human life.' [1]

Date of Composition.

For the date of *Troilus and Criseyde* we have but slight and unsatisfactory evidence. That it was written before 1386, the date of the *Legend of Good Women*, we know from the reference to it in that work. Since in the *House of Fame* Chaucer determines to desist from the pursuit of Fame, by which we may understand the production of pretentious works in the Italian manner, it may be assumed that *Troilus* is earlier than the *House of Fame*.

[1] Professor Price finds that of these fifty scenes, thirty-two are conducted by means of dialogue, nine are soliloquy or monologue, only two are trio scenes, while seven introduce a larger group of speakers.

From the fact that Troilus is mentioned among the famous lovers in the *Parliament of Fowls*, it has been argued, rather inconsequently, that *Troilus* is earlier than the *Parliament* (1382). From its subject-matter the poem cannot have been written earlier than the first Italian voyage of 1373; probably it belongs after the second voyage of 1378. A date not far from 1380 would well satisfy the conditions, for the work is one which shows Chaucer's power in full maturity. Because of the large indebtedness of the poem to Boethius, and because in the lines to Adam Scrivener the two works are named together, it has been thought that *Troilus* and the Boethius translation were executed at about the same time.[1]

'The Middle Age is a great big child, and like all children is continually asking for new stories. Its story-tellers go for their material to all sources; for all are in their eyes of equal value.' The words of M. Joly in the introduction to his edition of the *Roman de Troie* explain well the immense popularity of such story-tellers as Boccaccio and Chaucer, and show the attitude of mind in which we moderns must approach their work. In another place he says: 'The Middle Age has no notion of chronology. This is one of the characteristics of childlike peoples: all that they can do is to distinguish between yesterday and long ago. The Arab not only cares little for the dates of history, he does not even count the days; time is nothing to him. So too the peasant can form for himself no idea of degrees of antiquity; he only knows that it is "very old." Indeed, he recognizes but two

The Troy Story.

[1] Dr. Tatlock's contention (*Modern Philology*, 1. 317–329), based on the reference in Gower's *Mirour de l'Omme* to the geste of Troilus and 'la belle Creseide,' that *Troilus* was written earlier than 1377, is not convincing.

dates, the present and the past; and all past times are of the same value; they blend together in the same remoteness and the same haze of obscurity.'

Of the many sources from which the Middle Age satisfied its thirst for stories, three stand out preëminent. There is first the 'matter of France' with its heroic tales of Charlemagne and Roland; there is again the 'matter of Brittany' with its romances of the Table Round; and lastly, the source with which we are immediately concerned, 'the matter of Rome the Great.' By this last phrase we are to understand, of course, not merely Rome, but the whole field of classical antiquity, — the wars of Alexander, the tale of Thebes, and above all, the 'tale of Troy divine.'

To understand the great popularity of the Trojan story in the Middle Ages, we must take into account first of all a strange belief held as literal truth of history by the various peoples of Western Europe. To them the tale of Troy was not merely a thoroughly good story of battles long ago, fought by uncouth warriors in an uncouth land; it was portion and parcel of their own heroic past. Hector and Troilus and Priam were not foreigners and strangers, but of their own kith and kin; for were not the Franks descended from one Francio, a prince of Troy? did not the 'veracious' Geoffrey declare that the Britons took their name from an ancestor Brito, or Brutus, who led a band of Trojans to the shores of Albion? So, too, the Norse chroniclers assure us that the great Odin is no other than Priam, and that Asgard itself is but another name for Troy. This strange belief, quite possible of acceptance in an uncritical age to which all past history was wrapped in an undistinguished haze of antiquity, is easily explained. Virgil had given supreme literary expression to the legend which carried back the history

of Rome to the flight of Trojan Æneas. Rome had been the great mistress of the world, and her glories, though faded in fact, still lived in the imagination of men. There stood the great unfaded fact of the Roman Church; there lived the ideal of a Holy Roman Empire embracing all Christendom. Whence came the pre-eminence of the Roman name? To an age which thought much of noble descent the answer was inevitable: from her heroic ancestry. If we barbarians of the North are to be a great nation, we too must contrive to find an ancestry from Troy, and claim kin with the great men of Rome. A little ingenious etymologizing, plausible enough to an age quite innocent of linguistic science, supplied the missing link; and the siege of Troy becomes the first chapter of our national history.

The child's love of a story and the patriot's desire to celebrate the glories of his race gave birth to a large number of 'histories' or romances, — the terms are interchangeable, — many of them of appalling length, which have as their theme the war of Troy. It is the purpose of this section to outline the course of development of the Troy story until it reaches its most perfect literary treatment in the *Troilus and Criseyde* of Chaucer.

A modern author who should wish to write of Troy would turn first of all to Homer; but in the Middle Ages Homer was little more than a name. To say, as has been said, that from the fourth century to the fourteenth the poems of Homer were unknown in Western Europe is probably an exaggeration. There must always have been a few scholars here and there who had some knowledge of Greek, picked up perhaps on journeys to the Levant; but for the vast majority of those who read at all, Homer was accessible only in

the *Epitome Iliados Homericæ* of Pindarus Thebanus (first century), where the events of the *Iliad* are condensed into 1100 lines of Latin hexameter. But even if Homer had been more easily accessible, it is doubtful whether he would have satisfied the mediæval historian. To begin with, he lived long after the events he undertakes to describe; and then, too, his work bears the marks of evident falsehood, for who can believe that the gods came down to earth and warred with men? Fortunately there was a better authority than that of Homer, the authority of an eyewitness, who himself took part in the expedition against Troy. This important document is the *Ephemeris Belli Trojani* of Dictys the Cretan.

Dictys Cretensis was, so the preface of the *Ephemeris* tells us, a dweller in Cnossus, who with Idomeneus and Merion took arms against Troy. Realizing with rare insight that the events which were passing by unheeded of most would be of deep interest to the generations to follow, Dictys kept a journal written in Phœnician characters. On the author's death, the six books of his chronicle were buried with him in a tin case, where they rested undisturbed until the thirteenth year of the reign of Nero, when they were fortunately exposed by an earthquake. A Greek, named Eupraxis, carried the manuscript to Rome, where, at the command of Nero, it was transliterated into Greek characters, and from the Greek version a Latin translation was made by one Septimius Romanus. It is hardly necessary to suggest that this story must not be taken too seriously. Whether the work is really a translation from the Geek, or whether the forgery was first launched in its present form, we cannot say with certainty; but scholars are now inclined to believe that the former is the case. The translation, if translation it be, occupies 113 pages of Teubner text, while the

period covered begins with the birth of Paris, and ends with the death of Ulysses. The prose style of the author is fairly good, being to a great extent an imitation of that of Sallust. The date of composition is probably the fourth century A. D. The following passage taken from chapter ix, describing the death of Troilus, will give a fair idea of what the book is like: —

At post paucos dies Græci instructi armis processere in campum lacessentes, si auderent, ad bellandum Trojanos. Quis dux Alexander cum reliquis fratribus militem ordinat atque adversum pergit. Sed priusquam ferire inter se acies, aut jaci tela cœpere, barbari desolatis ordinibus fugam faciunt: cæsique eorum plurimi, aut in flumen præceps dati, cum hinc atque inde ingrueret hostis atque undique adempta fuga esset. Capti etiam Lycaon et Troilus Priamidæ, quos in medium perductos Achilles jugulari jubet indignatus nondum sibi a Priamo super his, quæ secum tractaverat, mandatum.

Dictys was greatly preferred to Homer, because he was more trustworthy, being, as we have seen, an eye-witness, and excluding all traces of the supernatural; but there was one particular in which he was not perfectly satisfactory: he was a Greek, and, as such, prejudiced against the Trojans, who were our ancestors. It is not necessary, however, to trust to the narrative of a single prejudiced historian; by good fortune there was also an historian within the walls of Troy. The *De Excidio Trojæ Historia* of Dares the Phrygian gives us an authentic account of the war from the standpoint of the defeated Trojans.

Homer mentions (*Iliad*, 5. 9) one Dares, a rich man and blameless, a priest of Hephæstus. To him antiquity ascribed an *Iliad* older than Homer's. Of this lost work, probably the work of a sophist, the Latin version purports to be a translation made by Cornelius Nepos. Classical scholars believe that a Greek

original really existed, of which the Latin version is a condensation; but the condensation was certainly not made by Nepos. Ten Brink characterizes the *Historia* as 'a wretched, barren, often self-contradictory piece of work, written in the worst Latin.' It cannot have been composed earlier than the fifth century A. D. That Ten Brink has not been too hard on Dares may be shown by the following selection (chapter xxix): —

Postera die Trojani alacres in aciem prodeunt. Agamemnon exercitum contra educit. Prœlio commisso uterque exercitus inter se pugnat. Postquam major pars diei transiit, prodit in primo Troilus, cædit devastat, Argivos in castra fugat. Postera die exercitum Trojani educunt: contra Agamemnon. Fit maxima cædes, uterque exercitus inter se pugnat acriter. Multos duces Argivorum Troilus interficit. Pugnatur continuis diebus VII. Agamemnon indutias petit in duo menses.

Fifty-two pages of Teubner text are filled with such wretched stuff as this! But despite its inferiority, Dares seems to have been more popular with the Middle Ages than Dictys. He was a Trojan, and therefore a countryman; he was at any rate mercifully brief; perhaps, as Ten Brink suggests, the very fact that the work is but an epitome made it all the more available for the expansion and adornment which the Troy story was to receive at the hands of Benoit de Sainte-More.[1]

In the latter half of the twelfth century, according to M. Joly in the year 1184, appeared a work which lies at the foundation of the whole later development of the legend of Troy; this is the *Roman de Troie*

[1] There is some reason to believe that a much longer Latin version of Dares may have been extant in the Middle Ages, of which the existing *Historia* is a condensation.

of Benoit de Sainte-More.[1] Of Benoit, as of so many authors of the Middle Ages, we know nothing with certainty. M. Joly, the editor of the *Roman*, has tried to prove that he was a Norman attached to the English court of Henry II; but this scrap of information rests on the assumption that he is identical with a Benoit who wrote a *Chronique des Ducs de Normandie*, and this identification has been questioned.[2] However shadowy the life of Benoit may be, his book is a very substantial, and to the student a rather appalling, fact of 30,108 lines of octosyllabic couplets. Using as his basis the brief epitome of Dares,[3] and supplementing the matter there found from Dictys and Ovid, and perhaps other authors still, Benoit has given us a detailed history, which begins with the Argonautic expedition, describes the rape of Helen, the gathering of the Greek hosts, and, after telling the events of the siege and fall of Troy, devotes 5000 lines to the return of the Greek warriors to their homes, ending with the death of Ulysses. One would not like to be compelled to read the *Roman* through from cover to cover; but taken in moderate doses, Benoit has a good deal of poetic charm. Compared with Dictys and Dares, Benoit is great literature.

Whatever appeal Benoit may make to us by his poetry is powerfully reinforced by the sympathy he arouses in us as the victim of one of the most startling pieces of highway robbery in all the annals of plagiarism. A little more than a century after the appearance of the *Roman de Troie*, in 1287, an Italian named

[1] That Chaucer was acquainted with Benoit's *Roman*, and derived several hints from it for his *Troilus*, has been shown by Dr. J. W. Broatch in *The Journal of Germanic Philology*, 2. 14–28.

[2] My friend Professor F. M. Warren of Yale tells me that he has conclusive evidence that the *Roman* and the *Chronique* are the work of a single author.

[3] Or perhaps a longer version of Dares, now lost.

Guido delle Colonne produced in turgid Latin prose a paraphrase of Benoit's French poem. Guido, who was careful to say nothing about his indebtedness to Benoit, not only succeeded in passing off his *Historia Trojana* as an original composition; but was until after the middle of the nineteenth century actually believed to be the original from whom the hardly entreated Benoit drew the material of his *Roman*. Guido added little to the substance of the tradition; but because his work was in the universal language of Europe, it attained a wide circulation, was translated into many languages, and became the basis for several Middle English 'Troy Books,' of which Lydgate's is, perhaps, the most important.

Before considering the *Filostrato* of Boccaccio, the immediate source of Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*, it will be necessary to look back once more over the ground already traversed, and notice the degree of prominence given by earlier authors to the figures of Chaucer's pair of lovers. Homer merely mentions in a single passage (*Iliad*, 24. 257) the chariot-fighter Troilus as one of the sons of Priam whom Ares has destroyed. Virgil devotes a few lines to an account of his death (*Æneid*, 1. 474–478). Criseyde, or Briseida as Benoit calls her, probably represents two Homeric personages: Briseis, the slave of Achilles, whose name appears in the accusative Briseida in *Iliad*, 1. 184, and Chryseis, daughter of the seer Chryses, who is taken from Agamemnon at the command of Apollo. The accusative of her name, Chryseida, occurs in *Iliad*, 1. 182. As the professor of legerdemain will take two thin rabbits, and, rubbing them together in his hands, present us with one particularly fat rabbit, so these two unimportant characters have combined to form the heroine of the mediæval tale of Troy. In Dictys and

Dares, Troilus has become a more important figure among the sons of Priam, and Briseida is accorded some prominence; but there is no hint of any relationship between them. Dares, who realizes that posterity will be interested to know the personal appearance of the Greeks and Trojans, has given us a series of portraits of the more important personages on each side. Here is what he says of our hero and heroine: 'Troilum magnum pulcherrimum pro ætate valentem fortem cupidum virtutis. . . . Briseidam formosam non alta statura candidam capillo flavo et molli superciliis junctis oculis venustis corpore æquali blandam affabilem verecundam animo simplici piam.'

It is to Benoit de Sainte-More, so far as we can determine, that must be given the credit of inventing the story of the faithful love of Troilus and the faithlessness of Criseyde. One must not suppose, however, that the story furnishes the central theme of his voluminous work. It is merely an episode, which, during about a third of his work, serves to relieve the annals of bloodshed. We first meet the episode at line 12931, when a parliament is held to decide upon the return of Briseida to the Grecian camp; the death of Troilus occurs a thousand lines before the end of the poem.[1] In the main the events recorded agree with those described in the latter half of the poems of Boccaccio and Chaucer. Though a King Pandarus is mentioned by Benoit at line 12938 as one of the councilors in the Trojan parliament, he bears no part in the determination of the fortunes of Troilus and his love.

It was the genius of Boccaccio which first recognized

[1] For those who care to follow the story in its original form I will give a list of the passages in which the episode is treated: ll. 12931–12986, 13235–13831, 14211–14307, 14927–15112, 20057–20110, 20175–20330, 21369–21730.

in the Troilus and Briseida episode of Benoit the material for a single and unified love story. 'Boccaccio seems to have known both Guido and Benoit; Italian translations of both were then in existence; and on their basis he built up one of his most charming works, the most perfect of his epic poems. . . . The story lay before him finished, as part of a richly organized whole, and his only creative work was that specially suited to the poet, viz., the exercise of selection, of spiritual penetration, of deepening the characterization, and of glorifying all by a poetic presentation. . . . The fight may rage without before the walls, Hector or Ajax may acquire glory, Trojans or Greeks may gain the victory — of such things we only hear so much as the economy of the love romance requires. We are occupied with the sudden commencement and the violent growth of Troilus's passion; we almost participate while listening to his sighing and complaints; we follow with excitement the progress of the intrigue by which Griseida is made aware of his passion and begins to show some interest in the youthful prince, up till the moment when his supplication is granted. . . . This tender, sentimental tale (for the poet passes quickly over the conclusion, and all the warlike scenes) is presented by Boccaccio with great psychological discernment, and with the most personal participation, though here and there with a slight tinge of irony. A truly creative spirit is revealed by the way in which the details are worked out, and by the thousand little touches that make us interested in his characters. But all these touches converge to one point, all have the same tendency.'[1]

In spite of Ten Brink's assertion that Boccaccio found the story ready made to his hand, the Italian poet

[1] Ten Brink, *History of English Literature* (Eng. trans.), 2. 88–90.

has added much that is absolutely essential to the story as we know it. Benoit's episode, as we have seen, begins with the departure of the heroine for the Greek camp, and in consequence the main interest of the tale centres about her intrigue with Diomede, the Troilus story serving as little more than an introduction. All the earlier scenes of the *Filostrato* are Boccaccio's invention. To serve as motive force for this earlier part of the story, the poet has invented the character of Pandarus. The Pandarus of Boccaccio, to be sure, is not the middle-aged uncle of blunted moral perceptions whom we know from Chaucer; he is a young and sprightly Florentine gentleman, an intimate companion of Troilus, and cousin to Griseida. Nor do we find in him the same cleverness of intrigue as in Chaucer; for Boccaccio's heroine does not need to be trapped. The change that has been wrought by Chaucer in the character of Pandarus and in that of Griseida will be discussed in another section of this chapter.

Boccaccio, Chaucer, and Shakespeare.

In the preceding section of this chapter we have traced the development of the Troy myth as a whole, and have seen how the genius of Boccaccio, seizing on a single episode of Benoit's *Roman*, has made a new and independent romance, not of battles long ago, but of lovers and their love. This new creation has become one of the great world-stories, both in virtue of its intrinsic interest and because of its use by three great world-poets: Boccaccio, Chaucer, and Shakespeare. It is in the highest degree interesting to see how these three poets have altered or modified the theme, each in accordance with his own character and underlying literary purpose. Boccaccio is a thoroughgoing sentimentalist, and he has told the story, accordingly, with full sympathy. Troilo is a portrait of the poet himself, generous, high-spirited, enthu-

siastic, sentimental. He has been in love before; but on beholding Griseida in the temple, as Boccaccio first beheld Fiammetta, he loves her with all his soul. Pandaro is no cynical old bachelor, but a gay, light-hearted, loose-principled gallant, such as Boccaccio may have known at the Neapolitan court. Griseida is a fickle beauty, and little more. Troilo is the central figure of the poem, and with his love longings in the earlier part of the tale, and still more with his later sorrow, the reader is asked to sympathize in fullest measure.[1]

When Chaucer approached the story, he was no longer young, and any sentimentality of which he may once have been possessed had long since departed. He retells the story in the spirit of pure comedy, not unmixed with irony, sympathizing with none of its personages, laughing rather at them all. Troilus is a lovesick boy, who takes a beautiful but worthless woman for an angel of heaven. Pandarus is a middle-aged busybody, who, unsuccessful in his own loves, undertakes to manage the love of others. Criseyde is the artistic centre of the story, and on the strange complexity of her double nature Chaucer has expended his best energies, adding of his own invention two episodes which wholly alter the conception of her character. What these characters become in Chaucer's hands will be considered in detail later on. Here it is only necessary to repeat that Chaucer's attitude throughout is that of the satirical humorist. Thoroughly in accord with this altered purpose in the narrator is an interesting change which may be observed in what may be called

[1] An English translation of the *Filostrato* by W. M. Rossetti has been published by the Chaucer Society: *Chaucer's Troilus and Criseyde (from the Harl. MS. 3943) compared with Boccaccio's Filostrato, translated by W. M. Rossetti.* London, 1873.

the centre of gravity of the story. Though in the case of his *Palamon and Arcite*, taken like *Troilus* from a poem of Boccaccio, and written at about the same period of his development, Chaucer has very greatly condensed his original, *Troilus and Criseyde* is nearly half as long again as the *Filostrato*.[1] But Chaucer's additions and expansions are not evenly distributed through the story. They occur almost entirely in its earlier part, what may be termed in dramatic parlance the rising action, that section of the work which leads up to the complete union of the lovers and the fast-ensuing separation. In Boccaccio the first part of the story is told in 2288 lines, the second in 3224; in Chaucer the first part contains 4543 lines and the second 3514.[2] It will be seen that as a result of this elaboration of the first part, the dramatic centre of the story, which in the *Filostrato* comes well before the middle, is thrown by Chaucer well into the second half. The significance of this is considerable. To Boccaccio, the sentimentalist, the chief interest of the piece centres in the pathetic scenes of the falling action. To Chaucer, the humorist, the complication of the plot, the subtle interplay of motive, above all the psychological problem of Criseyde's character, appeal more strongly. With the woes of Troilus Chaucer has little sympathy; and when, in the Greek camp, the true character of Criseyde is unmasked to all, it ceases to interest him. He professes the utmost reluctance at narrating the faithlessness of Criseyde, to which, he tells us, he is constrained by stern necessity of following his author and telling strict truth; but his real reluctance is at the

[1] The *Filostrato* contains 5512 lines, *Troilus* has 8057.

[2] For these figures, and for the fact which they illustrate, I am indebted to the interesting study of the two poems by Professor Rudolf Fischer of Innsbruck in his work, *Zu den Kunstformen des Mittelalterlichen Epos*, Vienna and Leipzig, 1899, pp. 217–370.

necessity of carrying the story on to its conclusion after it has lost its absorbing interest.

If Chaucer has transformed the spirit of the story from pathetic sentimentality to half-ironical humor, Shakespeare, in his *Troilus and Cressida*, has approached it in a spirit of bitter cynicism and blackest pessimism. The love story, which is after all subordinate to the intrigues of the Grecian camp, has neither the romance of Boccaccio nor the humor of Chaucer; it is merely disgusting. Troilus remains much what he is in Chaucer; but Cressida has flung away even the pretense of virtue, and is merely a confessed wanton. The keen-sighted Ulysses reads her at a glance: —

> Fie, fie upon her!
> There 's language in her eye, her cheek, her lip,
> Nay, her foot speaks; her wanton spirits look out
> At every joint and motive of her body.
> O, these encounterers, so glib of tongue,
> That give accosting welcome ere it comes,
> And wide unclasp the tables of their thoughts
> To every ticklish reader! set them down
> For sluttish spoils of opportunity,
> And daughters of the game.[1]

That the generous Troilus, own brother to Romeo, should break his heart for such a woman as this is but another proof of the essential mockery of human life. Pandarus has lost all his geniality and humor, and is merely repulsive. To crown all, the final worthlessness of Cressida, and the breaking heart of Troilus, are interpreted to us by the syphilitic mind of Thersites, whose whole function in the play is to defile with the foulness of his own imagination all that humanity holds high and sacred.

Structurally as well as spiritually the play is bad, redeemed only by a few noble speeches in the Grecian

[1] *Troilus and Cressida*, 4. 5. 54–63.

camp; and it remains one of the puzzles of criticism that such a work should ever have proceeded from the great soul of Shakespeare.[1]

Every visitor to the Salon Carré of the Louvre has stood in puzzled fascination before the Mona Lisa of Da Vinci, trying to fathom the meaning of that unfathomable smile of tender sweetness or of cunning cruelty. Much the same puzzle is presented by the Criseyde of Chaucer. Are we watching the treacherous defeat of womanly noblesse, or the logical working out of a weak, sensual character? The former view is that generally taken by the critics. Ten Brink says of her: 'The English Criseyde is more innocent, less experienced, less sensual, more modest than her Italian prototype. What a multitude of agencies were needed to inflame her love for Troilus; what a concatenation of circumstances, what a display of trickery and intrigue, to bring her at last to his arms! We see the threads of the web in which she is entangled drawing ever closer around her; her fall appears to us excusable, indeed unavoidable. And if afterwards, after the separation, she does not resist the temptation of Diomedes — how is she accountable, if her mind is less true and deep than that of Troilus? how is she accountable, when that first fall robbed her of her moral stay?'[2] Whether this view is the true one can be determined only by a careful study of the character as it unfolds itself bit by bit in Chaucer's lines. Criseyde.

In Book I, Criseyde is presented to us only at long range, and through the eyes of Troilus. We learn of her father's treachery, and of its effect on her own

[1] Those who wish to pursue the theme still further in English literature may read Dryden's version of *Troilus and Cressida*, in which the character of the heroine is vitally altered by a new interpretation put upon her relations with Diomed.

[2] *History of English Literature* (Eng. trans.), 2. 92.

position in Trojan society. She is a widow, still in mourning; and this fact, coupled with the unpopularity of her father, leads her to live in the quiet retirement of her own home. We hear of her exceeding great beauty: —

> As to my dome, in al Troyes citee
> Nas noon so fair, for passing every wight
> So aungellyk was hir natyf beautee,
> That lyk a thing inmortal semed she,
> As doth an hevenish parfit creature,
> That doun were sent in scorning of nature.

We hear too that she 'kepte hir estat' and was loved and well spoken of by all.

After such introduction, we are given a brief view of the lady as she stands at the temple service. She is dressed in black; but in beauty she is matchless, and all the press is gladdened by her 'goodly looking.' She is always in dread of shame, and so she stands 'ful lowe and stille alloon;' but in contrast to this studious self-effacement the poet mentions her 'ful assured loking and manere.' Not only is she beautiful; there is a certain queenly grandeur in her port: —

> She nas not with the leste of hir stature,
> But alle hir limes so wel answeringe
> Weren to womanhode, that creature
> Was never lasse mannish in seminge.
> And eek the pure wyse of here meninge
> Shewede wel, that men might in hir gesse
> Honour, estat, and wommanly noblesse.

Is Criseyde conscious that she has attracted the attention of Troilus? We cannot be sure. Chaucer himself professes his doubt in the matter: —

> But how it was, certayn, can I not seye,
> If that his lady understood not this,
> Or feyned hir she niste, oon of the tweye;
> But wel I rede that, by no maner weye

Ne semed it [as] that she of him roughte,
Nor of his peyne, or whatsoever he thoughte.

Yet at the scene in the temple Chaucer says: —

To Troilus right wonder wel withalle
Gan for to lyke hir mening and hir chere,
Which somdel deynous was, for she leet falle
Hir look a lite aside, in swich manere,
Ascaunces, 'what! may I not stonden here?'
And after that hir loking gan she lighte,
That never thoughte him seen so good a sighte.

This is all that we see of Criseyde in Book I, though her presence, to be sure, fills all the long scene of Troilus's feverish love-longing.

Book II may be called the book of Criseyde. An overwhelming proportion of the lines is directly dedicated to the unfolding of her character. On a May morning Pandarus goes on his embassy to Criseyde's house. He finds her in a 'paved parlour' with two other ladies, listening to the 'geste of the Sege of Thebes,' quite unconscious of the fact that its author, Statius, was not to be born till near the middle of the first century A. D. He asks if it is a book of love she is reading, and is answered by a playful allusion to his own hopeless love. In answer to his suggestion that she put away her book and rise up and dance, she reminds him of her widowhood: —

'A! god forbede!' quod she, 'be ye mad?
Is that a widewes lyf, so god you save?
By god, ye maken me right sore adrad,
Ye ben so wilde, it semeth as ye rave!
It sete me wel bet ay in a cave
To bidde, and rede on holy seyntes lyves:
Lat maydens gon to daunce, and yonge wyves.'

This protestation is hardly to be taken very seriously; at least, Pandarus pays no attention to her words, but immediately begins to play on her woman's

curiosity by hinting at a great piece of news that he could tell an he would.[1] He does not satisfy her curiosity; but, appearing to change the subject, he insinuates the praise of Troilus, 'the second Hector.' He starts to take his leave; but of course she urges him to stay. Again they talk of things in general; and again Pandarus starts to go. At last, after much teasing, he tells her the news, giving her no chance to answer till he has spoken ten stanzas of appeal and argument.

Criseyde's reception of the news must be noticed carefully: —

> Criseyde, which that herde him in this wyse,
> Thoughte, 'I shal fele what he meneth, ywis.'
> 'Now, eem,' quod she, 'what wolde ye devyse,
> What is your reed I sholde doon of this?'

There is an air of cool deliberation about this which strikes one as quite incongruous. Here are no blushes, either of shame or pleasure, no trepidation of heart. Once more we are tempted to ask if Criseyde knew the secret in advance. Was all her curiosity mere shamming? Or, perhaps, had she only half guessed it?

But when Pandar has given his advice that she return love for love, and reminds her that every hour is wasting part of her beauty, and that when she is old no one will want her love, all this cool deliberation melts into a passionate burst of tears and reproaches. Pandarus is offended. Has she no confidence in him? Well, if only Troilus might live, it matters not what becomes of Pandarus. Criseyde begins to relent a little: —

> And thoughte thus, 'unhappes fallen thikke
> Alday for love, and in swich maner cas,
> As men ben cruel in hemself and wikke;

[1] Cf. stanzas 18–22.

> And if this man slee here himself, allas!
> In my presence, it wol be no solas.
> What men wolde of hit deme I can nat seye;
> *It nedeth me ful sleyly for to pleye.*'

Once more, particularly in the last of these lines, one discovers that curious tone of calculation which was noticed above. With a sudden shift of mood, she drops her rebukes and anxieties, and becomes curious about this new-found lover. Pandarus grows eloquent in his description of the love-longing of Troilus. At last he takes his leave; and Criseyde is left alone to consider her new situation. At this juncture, by good fortune, Troilus himself comes into view. It is not the love-sick Troilus, whom we saw in Book I, pouring out his griefs in Pandar's ears, but Troilus the warrior, fresh from battle, his charger wounded: —

> His helm to-hewen was in twenty places,
> That by a tissew heng, his bak behinde,
> His sheld to-dasshed was with swerdes and maces,
> In which men mighte many an arwe finde
> That thirled hadde horn and nerf and rinde;
> And ay the peple cryde, 'here cometh our joye,
> And, next his brother, holdere up of Troye!'

If anything were needed to complete Pandar's work, here is a living argument. Criseyde considers his excellent prowess, his estate and reputation, his wit, his shape, his courtesy, and above all his love for her. Would it not be a pity to slay such an one?

The student of the poem must read carefully Criseyde's long soliloquy in stanzas 101–116 of Book II. The passage is too long to quote; but attention must be called again to the tone of calm calculation, not to say casuistry, which characterizes it.

Criseyde now goes down into her garden, where her niece, Antigone, sings a song in praise of love, which

completes the overthrow of Criseyde's heart — if she really has a heart to be conquered.

On the next day Pandarus returns to the attack with a letter from Troilus, which Criseyde at first refuses to receive, — this surely is feigning! — but at length even consents to answer. Once more the warrior passes by.

If we stop now for a moment to take account of Criseyde's behavior in this, the preliminary stage of the action, we are impressed first of all by her absolute self-assurance — the 'ful assured loking and manere' which was noticeable as she stood in the temple. She is always, both in soliloquy and in conversation with her uncle, complete mistress of the situation, every word is calculated, every step is taken as the result of calm deliberation. One looks in vain for the innocence and inexperience postulated by Ten Brink: —

'It nedeth me ful sleyly for to pleye.'

The line sums up the lady's character completely.

It is an interesting fact that Criseyde, with all her native force of personality, never takes a single step of her own volition. It is Pandarus who through all the first half of the poem furnishes the motive power of the plot. As ambassador and love's advocate, he has spoken eloquently and with effect; he now shows his ability as strategist. He has persuaded the unwilling-seeming Criseyde to answer her lover's letters, but that is not enough; a personal interview must be contrived. Criseyde, as the daughter of an open traitor, has enemies in the city; and on the plausible pretext of a fresh persecution, Pandarus takes her to the royal palace of Ilion to crave the protection of the generous-hearted Hector and of his royal brethren. Here, by a clever manipulation of the persons assembled, Pandarus brings her to the feigned sick-bed of the truly love-sick

Troilus; and the first meeting of the lovers is an accomplished fact.

Less shrewd in its devising, but equally effective in result, is the piece of intrigue by which the lovers are brought to a secret meeting in Pandarus's house. It is entirely proper that with her attending ladies Criseyde should take supper under her elderly uncle's hospitable roof, and equally reasonable that on the advent of a drenching rain she should be persuaded to stay the night. Then follows the plausible lie of Troilus's jealousy. After long entreaty, Criseyde agrees to a brief interview; and her complete surrender follows as a matter of course. No reader of Chaucer will forget the dramatic scene in which the old sinner Pandarus goes to the fireside, takes a light, and settles himself in conscious triumph to read an old romance, while his protégés converse, nor the pregnant words with which he takes his leave: —

> Quod Pandarus, 'for ought I can espyen,
> This light nor I ne serven here of nought;
> Light is not good for syke folkes yën.'

These two scenes are of the first importance for an understanding of Criseyde's character as conceived by Chaucer, for they are Chaucer's original contribution to the plot. In the *Filostrato* no intrigue of any sort was necessary to bring the lovers together. After Griseida's interest in Troilo is aroused, Boccaccio needs only a commonplace assignation, made by Griseida with her eyes open, to bring about the climax of his tale. Since Chaucer has deliberately devised these two scenes of Pandarus's intrigue, it was obviously his purpose to give to Criseyde's fall the appearance of a betrayed innocence. Boccaccio's heroine lapses from virtue of her own free choice; Chaucer's Criseyde falls into a

cunningly laid trap. We are not to reproach her, but to pity her: —

> What mighte or may the sely larke seye,
> Whan that the sparhauk hath it in his foot?

But what if the 'sely larke' has deliberately allowed herself to be put in the sparrow-hawk's way? Is this 'appearance of a betrayed innocence' anything more than an appearance? We may pass over Criseyde's possible complicity in the first intrigue, for from that her honor receives no serious stain; but how of the second? Pandarus chooses for his supper invitation an evening, —

> Right sone upon the chaunging of the mone,
> Whan lightles is the world a night or tweyne,
> And that the welken shoop him for to reyne.

Pandarus delivers his invitation, —

> At whiche she lough, and gan hir faste excuse,
> And seyde, 'it rayneth; lo, how sholde I goon?
> . . . . . .
> Sone after this to him she gan to rowne,
> And asked him if Troilus were there?
> He swor hir, 'nay for he was out of towne,'
> And seyde, 'nece, I pose that he were,
> Yow thurfte never have the more fere.
> For rather than men mighte him ther aspye,
> Me were lever a thousand-fold to dye.'

From this conversation it looks decidedly as though Criseyde foresaw that she would be storm-bound at her uncle's house, and that she would not be the only guest under his roof. Chaucer himself professes ignorance on this point: —

> Nought list myn auctor fully to declare
> What that she thoughte whan he seyde so,
> That Troilus was out of town yfare,
> As if he seyde therof sooth or no.

When we remember that Chaucer's 'auctor' does not

relate this episode of the treacherous supper party at all, it is not strange that he does not list 'fully to declare' the heroine's motives in accepting the invitation. Chaucer's assumed ignorance is only a delicate literary device. It certainly looks as if Criseyde knew well enough what she was about.

But let us assume for the sake of argument that she went to her uncle's house in trustful innocence. What of her conduct after she arrives? Chaucer has developed his action step by step with such consummate skill, that the events of that fateful night seem to the reader as inevitable as a decree of fate. But Criseyde's free consent had to be won before Troilus was brought to her side, and this consent would scarcely have been given by a lady of blameless virtue.

We are not left to guess, however; Criseyde herself explains it all in a couplet, the force of which a careless reader might easily overlook: —

> This Troilus in armes gan hir streyne,
> And seyde, 'O swete, as ever mote I goon,
> Now be ye caught, now is ther but we tweyne;
> Now yeldeth yow, for other boot is noon.'
> To that Criseyde answerde thus anoon,
> '*Ne hadde I er now, my swete herte dere,*
> *Ben yolde, ywis, I were now not here.*'

There is but one conclusion to be drawn from all this. Chaucer has not really, as the critics tell us, ennobled the character of Boccaccio's heroine. She is the same lightly-loving lady, careful of her reputation, but careless of her honor. She is merely a little more clever in deceiving her friends. It is Pandarus that Chaucer has changed and developed. With a positive genius for intrigue, and a mistaken belief in his niece's virtue or prudence, he devises an elaborate scheme to bring about a series of meetings which she desires as

strongly as either Troilus or Pandarus. She has no objection to playing the rôle of betrayed innocence; and with just sufficient reluctance before the act, and reproach after it is accomplished (cf. 3. 1564–1570), to carry out the illusion, she walks with a hidden smile into the trap set by Pandarus with such needless craft. It is Pandarus, and not Criseyde, who is the dupe — an effect which adds immensely to the comedy of his character.

If so much be granted, Criseyde's actions in the two remaining books offer no serious difficulties in interpretation. Though light of love, she is far from being heartless; and her grief at leaving Troy and Troilus to rejoin her father in the Grecian camp is entirely sincere. She is really very fond of Troilus; for who can help liking the brave, handsome, free-spirited boy? Nor does she at all object to his idealization of her, untrue though she knows it to be. In that wonderfully wrought scene in which the Trojan ladies come to bid her farewell and torture her by their polite prattle, she really suffers, and we are right in pitying her. But that her heart is not really breaking, that her love for Troilus is not the love of a Juliet for Romeo, is shown by her refusal to assent to any of Troilus's plans for averting the separation, and her practical acquiescence in the royal decree.

When she rides away from Troy, I think she really means to keep her pledge to Troilus and return on the tenth day; but she had not reckoned with the personality of Diomede. He is no dreamy, idealizing boy, but a thorough man of the world. He does not lose his heart; he merely improves a good opportunity to win a lady's heart. All the greater will be his conquest if, as he suspects, she has a love in Troy. He needs no intriguing Pandarus, no long delay of courtship. He

spends no sleepless nights. Instantly he sets to work, and before the Grecian camp is reached, he has made an impression. That in the heart of a woman like Criseyde the absent Troilus should fade before so compelling a personality as that of Diomede is inevitable. Her potentially sensual nature has inevitably deteriorated in her relations with Troilus, so that to Diomede she falls a willing prey. Still she clings half-heartedly to Troilus; she has not ceased to care for him. Eventually, she thinks, I may keep my promise and return. Her letter holding out a false hope is not necessarily a willful lie. But Criseyde's damnation is complete.

If this interpretation of Criseyde is correct, proof of Chaucer's consummate skill will be found in the way in which he has conveyed a superficial impression that his heroine is a virtuous woman seduced by treachery, and has then in the sequel shocked and surprised us by her ready yielding to Diomede, all the while giving in his narrative the true interpretation of her character, which shall resolve all seeming inconsistency. One is tempted to ask, however, whether this artistic duplicity is not too successful in its attempt to mislead, and whether in consequence Criseyde has not proved to many readers a hopeless enigma.[1]

Troilus is your typical enthusiast and idealist. Living a life of fantasy and dream, he is rudely awakened by the gradual conviction of Criseyde's faithlessness, and is unable to recover from the shock. On a lower moral plane, and with reversal of sex, it is the same theme that Tennyson has worked out in his *Lancelot and Elaine*. Troilus.

As later in his ecstasy of love, so at the opening of

[1] The view of Criseyde's character presented in these pages was first suggested to me several years since in a conversation with my friend Professor Albert S. Cook.

the poem in his scorn of love, Troilus shows his impracticality. Never having felt the sting of love, the idealism of Troilus, mingled like most idealism with a strain of surquidry, makes him believe that he is superior to love. With the pride which presages a fall, Troilus strolls through the temple, scorning all fair ladies and all knights who dote on them, till suddenly the sight of Criseyde shatters in a moment all this fabric of the air.

> As proude Bayard ginneth for to skippe
> Out of the wey, so priketh him his corn,
> Til he a lash have of the longe whippe,
> Than thenketh he, 'though I praunce al biforn
> First in the trays, ful fat and newe shorn,
> Yet am I but an hors, and horses lawe
> I moot endure, and with my feres drawe.'

This shattering of his first dream of unreality does not shake the temperamental idealism of Troilus, because the first broken ideal is immediately replaced by one of greater power. It is merely a transference of enthusiasm; Diana is dethroned, but Venus reigns in her stead. There is, of course, some shame in his heart at the sudden change of front, which leads to careful concealment of his love, but his main attention is absorbed in the process of idealizing the newfound mistress. It never occurs to him, however, to take any active steps in his own behalf.

> 'She nil to noon swich wrecche as I be wonne,'

he thinks; would God I were arrived in the port of death, to which my sorrow will lead me! If Pandarus had not intervened, it is probable that Troilus would never have spoken a word to the lady of his heart. The love would have remained an ideal passion, like that of Petrarch for his Laura.

From the moment that Pandarus wrings from the

unwilling Troilus the name of his fair one, the destiny of Troilus is in the hands of another. And this new steersman is no Platonic idealist. All women, Pandarus holds, are subject to love, either celestial or natural; and since her beauty and youth render it unlikely that Criseyde has set her heart on things of heaven, there is every reason to think she will welcome the service of a worthy knight like Troilus. That she is his niece is no obstacle to Pandar's conscience: —

> Were it for my suster, al thy sorwe,
> By my wil, she sholde al be thyn to-morwe,

he has assured Troilus before learning the lady's identity.

Though accepting the proffered service, Troilus assures his friend that he desires nothing

> That toucheth harm or any vilenye.

Pandarus does not argue the point; but there is a consciousness of his emancipation from such Platonic nonsense in his carefully ambiguous answer: —

> Tho lough this Pandare, and anoon answerde,
> 'And I thy borw? fy! no wight dooth but so;
> I roughte nought though that she stode and herde
> How that thou seyst; but fare-wel, I wol go.'

It is Pandarus who broaches the subject to Criseyde; it is Pandarus who suggests that Troilus write a letter, and who later procures its acceptance; it is Pandarus who arranges the stratagem of the first meeting, and the subsequent betrayal of Criseyde. Troilus all the while does nothing but obey orders — and that with a trembling heart. Does he not actually faint away when brought face to face with the attainment of his desires? One feels that Pandarus has seduced him quite as much as he has Criseyde.

When Criseyde's departure for the Grecian camp is

determined, and Troilus must face his first great crisis, the helpless impracticality of his nature shows itself again. Though present in the parliament at which the question was debated, Troilus dares speak no word against the exchange; and at its conclusion merely indulges in characteristic laments. Indignantly he rejects Pandarus's suggestion that he find a new love; and when Pandarus suggests forcible abduction, Troilus, Hamlet-like, sees only objections and obstacles. Entirely in the character of an earlier Hamlet is the scene where Troilus, having betaken himself to a temple — perhaps the one in which he first saw Criseyde — argues through a hundred lines, and more, on the question of God's providence and man's free will. This digression has been called an artistic blemish in the poem. Perhaps so; but is it not entirely characteristic of Troilus as Chaucer has conceived him?

It is with a mingling of pathos and irony that Chaucer has shown the closing scenes of Troilus's story. While Criseyde is receiving the advances of Diomede, Troilus is sadly revisiting the scenes of his former happiness, looking gloomily at the barred windows of her empty house.

The tenth day comes; and we witness the feverish watching of Troilus. Pandarus encourages his hopes; but in his own heart he knows better.

> Pandare answerde, 'it may be, wel ynough;'
> And held with him of al that ever he seyde;
> But in his herte he thoughte, and softe lough,
> And to himself ful sobrely he seyde:
> 'From hasel-wode, ther Joly Robin pleyde,
> Shal come al that thou abydest here;
> Ye, fare-wel al the snow of ferne yere!'

The evidences of Criseyde's faithlessness are at last too clear for even Troilus's credulity. His love is gone;

his ideals are shattered. He has no resource left but to seek death in battle, which he finds at last from the hands of fierce Achilles. The idealism of a Troilus finds no abiding-place on earth.

> And whan that he was slayn in this manere,
> His lighte goost ful blisfully is went
> Up to the holownesse of the seventh spere,
> In convers letinge every element;
> And ther he saugh, with ful avysement,
> The erratik sterres, herkeninge armonye
> With sownes fulle of hevenish melodye.
>
> And doun fro thennes faste he gan avyse
> This litel spot of erthe, that with the see
> Enbraced is, and fully gan despyse
> This wrecched world, and held al vanitee
> To respect of the pleyn felicitee
> That is in hevene above; and at the laste,
> Ther he was slayn, his loking doun he caste;
>
> And in himself he lough right at the wo
> Of hem that wepten for his deeth so faste;
> And dampned al our werk that folweth so
> The blinde lust, the which that may not laste,
> And sholden al our herte on hevene caste.
> And forth he wente, shortly for to telle,
> Ther as Mercurie sorted him to dwelle.

Ten Brink calls Pandarus 'a strange combination of Polonius, Mercutio, and Sancho Panza.' As a comic creation he reminds one still more of Sir John Falstaff; for in Pandarus, as in Falstaff, we have the curious phenomenon of a character wholly destitute of moral elevation, who is nevertheless so fascinatingly interesting that he compels our admiration, even our affection. Pandarus, though he has some of Polonius's sententious wisdom, is never a 'tedious old fool;' though he is as free as Mercutio from any moral bias, he has none of Mercutio's fire-eating rashness;

Pandarus.

intellectually as well as socially he is the superior of Sancho Panza.

This masterly figure, perhaps the masterpiece of Chaucer's comic art, is almost wholly the poet's original creation. The Pandaro of Boccaccio is a young man, the *cousin* of Griseida (and of Troilo). As an entirely unprincipled young gallant, intimately acquainted with the hero, he fills his position of go-between with all propriety, while the comparative alacrity of the heroine makes unnecessary any elaborate treachery. By adding some twenty years to his age, and making him Criseyde's uncle instead of her cousin, and still more by causing him to use this more intimate relationship as an occasion for an act of downright treachery, Chaucer has made the character of Pandarus infinitely more abhorrent to our moral sense. But, on the other hand, Chaucer has endowed his Pandarus with an intellect. His masterful manipulation of Troilus and of Criseyde, his cleverness in repartee, his rich fund of quiet humor, his accumulated mass of practical wisdom, his unfailing good nature, above all his wonderful power as a conversationalist — all these win our involuntary respect and admiration. Moreover, any moral indignation which we may be inclined to feel against Pandarus, as the betrayer of his own niece, is softened as we begin to realize that Criseyde is a willing victim, if she is indeed to be thought of as a victim at all.

One positive virtue we must set down to the credit of Pandarus: his unflinching loyalty to Troilus. Though Troilus is, to be sure, a prince of the blood royal, there is nowhere the slightest suggestion that the friendly services of the old counselor are inspired by any selfish desire to keep a friend at court. Neither is there any suggestion that Pandarus is a mere parasite, who ex-

pects his friendship to be repaid in meats and drinks. Of course it may be urged that Pandarus, like all clever managers of men, takes the same delight in his intrigues that a good chess-player takes in the working out of his game, and that he does the work for the work's sake, and not from any love of Troilus. Unquestionably Pandarus enjoyed the working out of his plans; but in his first conversation with Troilus, and still more during the days immediately following Criseyde's departure from Troy, we find a tender patience with all the manifold extravagance of Troilus which argues genuine friendship. It is a good friend who will patiently listen to a lover's raptures and complaints.

It seems at first sight a curious friendship — that of the middle-aged cynic, whose ideals, if they ever existed at all, have faded into the monotone of common sense, for the extravagant idealist and enthusiast of twenty-odd. But the light-hearted Troilus of the days before he saw Criseyde must have been a charming fellow, with that indefinable attractiveness which one finds sometimes in a youth of good family and good parts. Then, too, there is the attraction which the fresh, unspoiled enthusiasm of youth exerts on those who have 'seen it all.' Even Jacques in *As You Like It* seeks the company of Orlando and of the disguised Rosalind.

The comic effectiveness of Pandarus is twofold. We have first the spectacle of a past-master of intrigue, who, adapting himself perfectly to the different characters of Troilus and Criseyde, is able to dominate the action completely, so long as it is confined to these characters, but who, on the intervention of an outside force in the decree of Criseyde's return to her father, suddenly finds himself without resource, unable to aid in the slightest toward the resolution of this situation

which he has created. Still more effective is the spectacle of an intriguer, who, if our interpretation of Criseyde's motives be correct, is exerting the highest endeavors of his intriguing genius to seduce a woman who needs no seduction, and who is all the time complete mistress of the situation.

CHAPTER VII

THE HOUSE OF FAME

The *House of Fame* is deserving of careful study and attention, not so much on the score of its intrinsic interest of matter, or its excellence as a piece of literary art, — though it is by no means lacking in either, — as because in it the poet of the *Canterbury Tales* has revealed himself more fully than in any other of his longer poems. The poem contains a philosophy of life, which, if not original, is at least noble. Its form is the artificial device of an allegorical dream-vision so dear to the mediæval soul, a device which is capable of the highest artistic truth only when informed by the burning religious zeal of a Dante or a Bunyan. Apart from the faults of this artificial form, one cannot ignore a certain lack of proportion, particularly in the disparity in length of the several sections or cantos, and the evidences of hurry in the abruptness with which the poem ends — faults which cannot be wholly atoned for by the grace and charm of language and verse, the vividness of imagination, and the delicacy of humor, which pervade the piece. Warton's criticism, though couched in the language of a generation gone by, does not come far from the truth. 'This poem,' he says, 'contains great strokes of Gothic imagination, yet bordering often on the most ideal and capricious extravagance.' Despite its defects, the poem has enough positive merit to win a reading, and to the lover of Chaucer its personal interest gives it a prominent place among his minor poems.

Ten Brink fixes the limits during which the *House of Fame* can have been composed as the years 1381–84.[1] His reasons for fixing these limits are as follows: that the poem was written later than *Troilus and Criseyde* (circa 1380) he argues from the similarity of several passages in the two poems, where the passage in *Troilus* seems to have been first composed.[2] Moreover, at the close of *Troilus* (5. 1788) Chaucer seems to indicate his intention of writing a 'comedy,' a term not inapplicable to the *House of Fame*. That the poem was written earlier than the Prologue to the *Legend of Good Women* may be gathered from the fact that in it Chaucer complains of the hardship entailed by his duties as comptroller of customs (*Fame*, 2. 144–152), while in the Prologue to the *Legend* we see his gratitude at his release. The permission to appoint a permanent deputy for the exercise of his official duties was given in February, 1385. Very ingenious, though not fully convincing, is Ten Brink's argument to show that the poem may have been composed in the winter of 1383–84. 'In the *House of Fame*, 1. 63, Chaucer names as the day of his vision the tenth of December. In the case of a poet who, either in earnest or in sport, busied himself so deeply with questions of astronomy and astrology, we must straightway ask to which of the planets that day may have been subject. On this point Chaucer does not leave us for a moment in doubt. Repeatedly in his poem he emphasizes the fact that he owed his journey to the House of Fame to the favor of the thunder-god, Jupiter (cf. 2. 100 f., 134, 153; 3. 917). Now the tenth of December fell on a Thursday [Jovis

Date.

[1] *Studien*, p. 124.

[2] Cf. *Troil.* 5. 358–385 with *Fame*, 1. 2–54; *Troil.* 1. 512–518 with *Fame*, 2. 131, 132.

dies] in the year 1383.'[1] Professor Koch says of Ten Brink's theory as to the date of the poem, that it is so well established that scarcely any doubt can be raised against it. Mr. H. Frank Heath, however, in his introduction to the poem in the Globe Edition, suggests that, in view of the employment of the short couplet so characteristic of Chaucer's earlier verse, the work may have been commenced some years before 1383, and then laid aside, to be finished after the completion of *Troilus*. The poem betrays, both in matter and in spirit, so strong an Italian influence that I am apt to favor any theory which shall bring its inception near to Chaucer's return from the second Italian voyage of 1378.[2] Book III, however, when considered in its allegorical import, seems clearly to belong to the close of the period.

Italian Influence.

Chaucer brought back with him from Italy much more than an acquaintance with the Tuscan speech and its literary masterpieces. Whether or not he ever spoke face to face with Petrarch, it is impossible that he should have failed to make acquaintance with the ideas of a man whose influence was the dominating one in the literary and scholarly circles of Italy in the latter half of the fourteenth century. As I have shown elsewhere, the fundamental idea of the Petrarchan Renaissance was individualism, the importance of the individual life and character. This idea entails, of course, the habit of introspection, with its accompanying tendency toward self-revelation, and as an inevitable result of this searching of self, the desire for glory or Fame. Under the stress of this new influ-

[1] *Studien*, pp. 150, 151.

[2] Since these pages were written, an elaborate argument has appeared to prove that the *House of Fame* was written earlier than *Troilus*. (J. L. Lowes, in *Publications of the Modern Language Association*, 20. 854–860.) The argument does not seem to me convincing.

ence, Chaucer must have asked himself whether he could hope to build an everlasting fame by continuing to write the amatory verse of his earlier French models, precisely the sort of 'vulgar' composition which Petrarch so deeply despised. Should he not, too, rise to higher things, even though he should not abandon the vernacular for the more scholarly Latin? In its striving for a more exalted theme, in its personal, autobiographical tone, most of all in its choice of Fame as a subject, the poem shows the influence of Italy and of Petrarch.

Sources.

No single source for the *House of Fame* has been discovered, nor is it likely that any will be. Warton's vague suggestion that 'it was originally a Provencial composition' is certainly wrong. Quite recently, in the present-day infatuation for folk-lore study, an attempt has been made to find in European folk-lore a suggestion for the mountain of ice reached by a journey on an eagle's back, an attempt which is very far from convincing.[1] There is no good reason to doubt that Chaucer alone is responsible for the plot, though, as we shall see, he drew largely on his reading in working out its details.

Among the works on which Chaucer drew, the first place is occupied by the *Divine Comedy* of Dante. The resemblances between the *House of Fame* and the divine poem of Dante, first noticed by the French critic, Sandras, in his *Étude sur G. Chaucer* (1859), and further elaborated by Ten Brink in his *Studien*, have been worked out with great thoroughness by Professor Rambeau in *Englische Studien*, 3. 209–268. In each case the poet finds himself alone in a great wilderness. As Virgil and Beatrice conduct Dante

[1] A. C. Garrett, 'Studies in Chaucer's House of Fame,' *Harvard Studies and Notes in Philology and Literature*, 5. 151–176.

through the world of spirit, and explain to him the meaning of what he sees, so the philosophical eagle seizes on Chaucer, and bears him aloft to the House of Fame, entertaining him on his journey with scientific discourse on the nature of sound. Dante, too, was borne aloft on the back of an eagle (*Purgatorio*, 9). Each poem is divided into three divisions. In many passages direct imitation of Dante's words may be shown. Professor Rambeau adduces many other parallels between the two poems, most of which are rather fanciful. It is clear enough, however, that Chaucer was well acquainted with Dante at the time he wrote the *House of Fame;* but that the English poem is in any sense an imitation of the Italian becomes absurd when we contrast the terrible seriousness of Dante with the playful tone which runs all through the *House of Fame*. Nor is there any reason to consider that Chaucer was parodying the *Divine Comedy*. If we could believe Chaucer guilty of such a sacrilege, the wide divergence of the two pieces makes the idea impossible.

Next to Dante, the strongest influence is that of Virgil. The events of the *Æneid* are digested in the description of the carvings on Venus's temple in Book I, and the description of Lady Fame in Book III is indebted to *Æneid*, 4. 173–183. To the *Metamorphoses* of Ovid, 12. 39–63, Chaucer was, of course, indebted for the general conception of a House of Fame.

Other works whose influence may be traced are the *Somnium Scipionis* of Cicero, with the commentary of Macrobius, always a favorite book with Chaucer, the *Anticlaudianus* of Alanus de Insulis, the *De Nuptiis Philologiæ et Mercurii* of Martianus Capella, and the *Amorosa Visione* of Boccaccio. There is no evidence that Chaucer used the *Trionfo della Fama* of Petrarch.

Perhaps this is the best place to notice that Pope

has adapted the third book of the *House of Fame* under the title of *The Temple of Fame*. Warton's criticism of this paraphrase may be allowed to stand: 'Pope has imitated this piece, with his usual elegance of diction and harmony of versification. But in the mean time he has not only misrepresented the story, but marred the character of the poem. He has endeavored to correct its extravagances by new refinements and additions of another cast: but he did not consider that extravagances are essential to a poem of such a structure, and even constitute its beauties. An attempt to unite order and exactness of imagery with a subject formed on principles so professedly romantic and anomalous, is like giving Corinthian pillars to a Gothic palace. When I read Pope's elegant imitation of this piece, I think I am walking among the modern monuments unsuitably placed in Westminster Abbey.'

The Allegory.

To get from the poem the nearer view of Chaucer's character and aspirations which constitutes its chief interest, one must seek to penetrate the veil of allegory with which the author has partially concealed it. Though the reading of such allegorical riddles is always fraught with some danger of error, the indications in the present case are so clear that one cannot go far astray.

In Book I Chaucer tells how in a dream he found himself in the Temple of Venus, made all of glass, and how the walls of the temple were all painted over with the story of Æneas. Beautiful as the place is, Chaucer is not satisfied.

> 'A, Lord!' thoughte I, 'that madest us,
> Yet saw I never swich noblesse
> Of images, ne swich richesse,
> As I saw graven in this chirche;
> But not woot I who dide hem wirche,

Ne wher I am, ne in what contree.
But now wol I go out and see,
Right at the wiket, if I can
See o-wher stering any man,
That may me telle wher I am.'

But on leaving the temple, the poet finds himself alone, and in a vast desert of sand. So terrible is the desolation that he prays to be delivered 'fro fantom and illusioun.' This temple of glass, beautiful but unreal, is the realm of poesy in which Chaucer had hitherto spent his days, scanning the pages of Virgil and Ovid, making essays of his own in amatory verse. It is because the poetry which Chaucer knew, and the poetry he had written, deals so largely with love that the temple is called the Temple of Venus.[1] It will be noticed that in describing the scenes from the *Æneid* depicted on the walls, chief prominence is given to the love episode of Queen Dido. As a result, we may believe, of his contact with the nobler intellectual interests of Italy, Chaucer determined to leave this region of fantasy, and step out into the world of reality. He finds it a desert.

The meaning of this is made clear in the account which the eagle gives later of Chaucer's daily life. When he is not at the custom-house making his reckonings, he is at home, poring over other books 'til fully daswed is his loke,' enditing of love and love's folk, —

And livest thus as an hermyte
Although thyn abstinence is lyte.

So complete is his isolation that he gets no tidings of what is going on in far countries, and of his very neighbors that dwell almost at his doors he hears 'neither that ne this.' It is this remoteness of his life which

[1] Cf. *Fame*, 2. 106–120.

makes the world of the actual which he tries to enter merely a deserted place. How shall he win for himself a name and fame, and attain the ambition which his Italian journey has set before him?

It is Philosophy, figured by Jove's eagle, which snatches him up and shows him the kingdoms of earth and of heaven.

> And tho thoughte I upon Boëce,
> That writ, 'a thought may flee so hye
> *With fetheres of Philosophye*
> To passen everich element.'

Much does Chaucer see on his journey, and much does he hear of scientific lore; but the great end is to be the House of Fame, the abode of that goddess for which all Italy was sighing.

Before seeking out the meaning of the third book, it is necessary to distinguish between the two senses in which, with some confusion to the reader, Chaucer has used the word fame. One meaning is 'rumor,' 'general report,' the mysterious dissemination of tidings. Using this general report, or rumor, as a basis, some mysterious power distributes to men their meed of glory or reputation, and this is the secondary meaning of the word fame. It is with the first of these two meanings in view that the eagle gives his scientific explanation of how all reports tend by their own nature to fly upwards to a single centre, which

> Is set amiddes of these three,
> Heven, erthe, and eek the see.

But in the third book we are shown first the dwelling-place of the goddess of reputation or glory. The poetic imagery is easy of interpretation. The mount of ice is slippery of ascent, and in its nature so lacking in permanence that the names inscribed upon it melt easily away. Only on the northern side, the direction

of hardships and stern toil, were there any names of endurance. It is the bright sun of favor, not the beating of the storm, which destroys reputation. Round about the castle which crowns this mount of ice are story-tellers, minstrels, poets, all those who help to give and to perpetuate a name. The lady Fame herself, is a wondrous 'feminyne creature,' *semper mutabile*, who, like Virgil's *Fama*, is of such varying stature that one moment she seems less than a cubit in height, and the next her head touches the heavens. So does Fame wax and wane. Mutable in her outward form, the Lady is equally capricious in the bestowal of her favor. Perhaps the most brilliant stroke of poetic imagination in the poem is the scene where the various companies of men, the deserving and the desertless, come to ask their boons of glory and oblivion, and are answered with no rule or reason, but merely as the whim of the moment may dictate.

The moral of all this is plain enough. 'What is this fame for which we mortals sigh so windily?' Uncertain and evanescent, it is bestowed in so unreasonable a way that a man of reason and self-respect cannot but despise it. This is Chaucer's deliberate conclusion. As he stood marveling at all this gear, some one addressed him, —

> And seyde: 'Frend, what is thy name?
> Artow come hider to han fame?'
> 'Nay, for-sothe, frend!' quod I;
> 'I cam noght hider, graunt mercy!
> For no swich cause, by my heed!
> Suffyceth me, as I were deed,
> That no wight have my name in honde.
> I woot myself best how I stonde;
> For what I drye or what I thinke,
> I wol myselven al hit drinke.'

These lines have the ring of true nobility in them.

What Chaucer has gone out for to seek is fame in the sense of tidings. He would fain know more of human life and the deeds of men.

This legitimate desire is satisfied in the house of Rumor, the '*domus Dedali*' to which Chaucer is now conducted. Here are tidings in abundance, false and true, of all sorts of happenings under heaven. Here are shipmen and pilgrims, pardoners and messengers, —

> With scrippes bret-ful of lesinges,
> Entremedled with tydinges.

If Chaucer cannot feel at home in the wide world which seemed to him a wilderness, if it seems to him contrary to the bent of his own character to seek for fame by writing high philosophies, he can at least escape from the artificialities of conventional poetry, and mingle with men as an auditor and spectator, if not as an actor. He can thus keep himself in touch with reality, and not spend his life in dreams.

The poem breaks off abruptly, and we do not know how Chaucer planned to end it; perhaps he did not know himself.[1] At all events, the poem as we have it leaves Chaucer in the house of Rumor, and there we find him as he rides with a company of shipmen and pilgrims and pardoners, an interested spectator and auditor, on the road to Canterbury.

Chaucer has felt the influence of the new ideas spread by Petrarch and his school. Temporarily they have swayed him. Under their influence he has cast aside the old; his intelligence has been awakened to a new and livelier interest in human activities; but his own native modesty and good sense have saved him from more than a temporary access of the feverish thirst for fame.

[1] For an interesting speculation on the subject, see the article by A. C. Garrett cited above.

'I woot myself best how I stonde;
For what I drye or what I thinke,
I wol myselven al hit drinke.'

If one had any satisfactory proof for Heath's suggestion, noticed above, that the first two books were written at an earlier period than Book III, one might show how this process of development extended itself over several years, and how, perhaps, the more ambitious theme of *Troilus*, and the more scholarly work of the Boethius translation, suggest a temporary seeking after the fame which came to Chaucer unsought as the poet of the *Canterbury Tales*.

It would be a great pity to leave this poem without pausing for a few moments over the delicious vein of delicate humor that runs through it — the guarded allusion to the disagreeable sound of his wife's voice as she awakes him of a morning (2. 560–566); the suggestion of his own substantial figure in the eagle's twice repeated exclamation: — Humor.

'Seynte Marie!
Thou art noyous for to carie!'

the poet's fear as he is borne aloft to the stars: —

'Shal I non other weyes dye?
Wher Joves wol me stellifye,
Or what thing may this signifye?'

the eagle's self-satisfied query: —

'Have I not preved thus simply,
Withouten any subtiltee
Of speche, or gret prolixitee
Of termes of philosophye?'

to which Chaucer, taking the part of wisdom, answers 'Yis.'

'A ha!' quod he, 'lo, so I can
Lewedly to a lewed man

> Speke, and shewe him swiche skiles,
> That he may shake hem by the biles,
> So palpable they shulden be.'

Though the eagle speaks with the tongue of men and angels, the poet does not forget that he is a bird, and reminds his readers of the fact by the delicious conceit 'shake hem by the biles.' It would be idle to point out all the humorous touches of the poem. If the reader cannot see them for himself, as Matthew Arnold would say, '*morietur in peccatis suis*.' What seems to me highly significant is that in this, his most introspective, self-revealing poem, Chaucer preserves his sense of humor. The theme is serious, and, we may believe, of vital import to the poet; but he is too sane to suppose that his own thoughts and feelings are of serious consequence to the universe. He reveals himself, to be sure, but playfully. The sense of humor is a safe antidote for the feverish thirst of fame.

CHAPTER VIII

THE LEGEND OF GOOD WOMEN

THE *Legend of Good Women* marks the beginning of what is ordinarily called Chaucer's third period, the period which reaches full flower in the *Canterbury Tales*. Itself a collection of tales bound together by community of theme and by a common prologue, it may in deed be thought of as a direct precursor of the greater collection which follows. Chaucer has ceased to feel the overmastering influence of Italian models; and though the intellectual stimulus received from Italy was not to spend itself until his death, he is feeling about for a form of literary expression which shall be essentially his own. That the *Legend* was in some sort an experimental venture is suggested by the fact that it was left unfinished, crowded from its place in his attention by the vastly superior conception of the *Canterbury Tales*. But experiment though it be, it is far from being a failure. The nine legends which Chaucer wrote are good pieces of narrative, told with the poet's peculiar grace and charm; while the Prologue is, in its beauty of imagery, its buoyant freshness of an English Maytide, in its general conception and execution, one of Chaucer's most successful and most beautiful productions.

Sources.

The *Legend* consists of a series of tales, drawn from the storehouse of classical antiquity, recounting the fortunes of noble women, true in love, introduced by a prologue poem of the dream-vision type so popular in the allegorical literature of

the Middle Ages. In the case of such a work, one need not look for any single source; one will ask rather what models Chaucer may have had before him, or what earlier works may have suggested the scheme of his poem. Two such works immediately suggest themselves: the *Heroides* of Ovid, a series of imaginary letters sent by heroines of mythology to their faithless lovers, and, nearer to Chaucer's own time, the *De Claris Mulieribus*[1] of Boccaccio, a collection of stories in Latin prose, wherein are epitomized the fortunes of famous women. The first of these works Chaucer certainly knew; and there is every probability that he was acquainted with the other.

In compiling materials for the individual legends, Chaucer seems to have done what any modern author would do under similar circumstances: he read all the accounts of his heroines which were readily accessible to him, and selected, adapted, and combined, as his literary taste impelled him. In the case of the first legend, that of Cleopatra, it is not very clear just what versions of the story Chaucer used. Perhaps a Latin translation of Plutarch's life of Antony was accessible to him; perhaps, too, he consulted the *Historia adversum Paganos* of Orosius (fifth century A. D.) and the *De Claris Mulieribus* of Boccaccio. Pretty certainly he was acquainted with the *Epitome Rerum Romanarum* of Florus, a Roman historian of the reign of Hadrian. The legend of Thisbe was drawn entirely from Ovid's account of the lady in *Metamorphoses*, 4. 55–166, though the source was used by Chaucer with characteristic freedom. The story of Dido is taken, of course, from Virgil, though a few lines (1355–1365)

[1] Similar in character, though wider in its scope, is the *De Casibus Virorum et Feminarum Illustrium* of the same author, used by Chaucer as the model for his *Monk's Tale*.

are from Ovid's *Heroides*, 7. 1–8. For the stories of Hypsipyle and Medea Chaucer went, naturally enough, to Ovid;[1] but he seems to have made even greater use of the account given in the *Historia Trojana* of Guido delle Colonne.[2] For the story of Lucretia Chaucer himself refers us to Livy and to Ovid,[3] the latter of whom is his principal source. The remaining legends are based chiefly on Ovid, whose influence is the dominant one in the whole collection. Other works which Chaucer may well have consulted are the fables of Hyginus, the two works of Boccaccio mentioned above, and the compendium of classical mythology by the same author entitled *De Genealogia Deorum*.[4] Most of the stories of the *Legend of Good Women* are also told by Gower in the *Confessio Amantis;* so that one may, if he pleases, see how a less gifted contemporary uses the same material.[5]

For the Prologue the problem of sources is much less clear. It seems to have been composed under the general influence of a school, rather than of any particular models. This school is that of the French love-allegory, with its familiar devices of a dream-vision and a court of love, and its unfailing accompaniments of May-morning, singing birds, and springing flowers, of which the *Roman de la Rose* is the great exemplar.[6] From among the vast throng of French love-allegories of this type, it is possible to segregate a small group

[1] *Metamorphoses*, 7. 1–296; *Heroides*, 6 and 12.

[2] Cf. above, p. 98.

[3] *Fasti*, 3. 461–516.

[4] Chaucer's indebtedness to the *De Genealogia* has been convincingly proved by C. G. Child in *Modern Language Notes*, 11. 238–245.

[5] For a discussion of the sources of the *Legend* and of the relation of Chaucer's work to Gower's, see the excellent article by M. Bech in *Anglia*, 5. 313–382.

[6] For a very thorough account of this poetry, see Professor W. A. Neilson's *The Origins and Sources of the Court of Love*, Boston, 1899.

which exerted a more particular influence on the Prologue.

Some twenty years before the probable date of Chaucer's *Legend*, the French poet Guillaume de Machault wrote a *Dit de la Marguerite*, wherein a lady named Marguerite, very likely a mistress of Machault's patron Pierre de Lusignan, king of Cyprus, is praised under the figure of the flower whose name she bears. The cult of the daisy was immediately taken up by Machault's literary disciples, Froissart and Deschamps. Froissart in his *Dittié de la Flour de la Marguerite* and his *Paradys d'Amours* uses the same symbolism, with extravagant praise of the daisy, in honor of another Marguerite; and Deschamps carries the same device even farther in his *Lay de Franchise*, and in several of his balades. As the fashion gained vogue, this symbolism of the daisy was applied even to ladies whose name did not happen to be Marguerite. So that one need not be surprised to find in the Prologue to Chaucer's *Legend* that the daisy is used to symbolize Alcestis, and, through her, Chaucer's patroness, Queen Anne.[1]

With the work of all three of these poets Chaucer, we know, was familiar; with Deschamps he had personal relations of peculiar interest; for a balade of Deschamps is addressed to the 'grant translateur, noble Geffroy Chaucier.'[2] From the balade itself we learn that it was to be sent to Chaucer, together with other of Deschamps's poems, by the hands of Sir Lewis Clifford.[3] It is entirely possible that the *Lay de Franchise*, with

[1] For a discussion of the marguerite poems and their influence on Chaucer, see the article by J. L. Lowes on the *Legend of Good Women*, in *Publications of the Modern Language Association*, 19. 593–683 (1904).

[2] The balade is reprinted entire in the *Oxford Chaucer*, 1. lvi, lvii.

[3] For an account of Clifford, see the article by Professor Kittredge on 'Chaucer and some of his Friends,' in *Modern Philology*, 1. 1–18.

its praise of the marguerite, was one of the poems thus transmitted from the poet over-seas. However it reached him, we can be all but sure that the *Lay de Franchise*, and Froissart's *Paradys d'Amours*, and perhaps other of the marguerite poems, were in Chaucer's mind when he composed his Prologue.[1] It is to this group of marguerite poets, then, and to the still larger group of their countrymen who had written courtly allegories of love, that Chaucer is speaking in the familiar lines near the beginning of his poem: —

> Ye lovers, that can make of sentement;
> In this cas oghte ye be diligent
> To forthren me somwhat in my labour,
> Whether ye ben with the leef or with the flour.
> For wel I wot, that ye han herbiforn
> Of making ropen, and lad awey the corn;
> And I come after, glening here and there,
> And am ful glad if I may finde an ere
> Of any goodly word that ye han left.

One need only say that Chaucer's gleaning was indeed rich.

Date and Circumstances of Composition.

In the Patent Rolls for the eighth year of the reign of Richard II, under date of February 17 [1385], there is a writ by which the king grants 'by special grace to our beloved Geoffrey Chaucer, comptroller of our customs and subsidies in the port of our city of London,' the privilege of appointing a permanent deputy to conduct the business which he had before been commanded to transact with his own hand. With what delicious sense of untrammeled freedom must Chaucer have closed his books of reckonings, and taken farewell of his not too congenial associates at the custom-house on Thames-bank. No

[1] Despite the contention of Dr. Lowes in the article cited above, these poems seem to me to have served as suggestions, rather than as definite sources.

longer need he crowd his study and his writing into the evening hours, after a day's work was already done. In October of the same year he was made justice of the peace for Kent, and in the year following he was elected knight of the shire to represent the same county in Parliament. These facts, taken in connection with his abandonment in October, 1386, of his house over the city-gate in Aldgate, suggest that the poet may have gone to live for a while among the fields and flowers which he loved.

In the *Parliament of Fowls*, written to celebrate the royal marriage of Richard to the Princess Anne of Bohemia, which took place in 1382, Chaucer closes with the wish: —

> I hope, ywis to rede so som day
> That I shal mete som thing for to fare
> The bet; and thus to rede I nil not spare.

Both king and queen must surely have been pleased by the poem, and perhaps the delicate hint of these closing lines, reinforced by Chaucer's charming picture in the *House of Fame* of his own desire to flee from the press, and dwell in the realm of the poet's fantasy, directly influenced the king to grant the relief from official duties to which we have just referred. It is a pleasing and plausible theory, if not quite a demonstrated fact, that the enthusiastic praise bestowed by Chaucer on the young Queen Anne under the figure of Alcestis in the Prologue[1] to the *Legend of Good Women* had

[1] The remarks which follow apply to the B version of the Prologue. The relations of the A version to this will be considered later. Until very recently, no one has questioned the identification of Alcestis with Queen Anne in the B version. Dr. Lowes, in the article cited above, assures us that the lines which have seemed to imply this identification are mere conventional commonplaces of the marguerite poetry. He forgets, however, that conventional formulas may be used to express genuine feeling.

its roots in his gratitude for this relief, obtained, it may be, through intercession of the Queen herself.[1] That the poem was to be dedicated to the queen is clearly indicated in Alcestis's command: —

> And whan this book is maad, yive hit the quene
> On my behalfe, at Eltham, or at Shene.

Chaucer's disciple, Lydgate, even asserts in the Prologue to his *Fall of Princes* that it was written 'at the request of the quene;' but Lydgate may merely be indulging in conjectural scholarship on his own account.

This dedication to the queen enables us to place the composition of the Prologue between 1382, the date of Richard's marriage, and 1394, when Queen Anne breathed her last, and her royal husband, in his grief, tore down the palace at Shene, where she had died. For a more definite date within this period of twelve years we are left largely to conjecture; and the most plausible conjecture is that which associates the Prologue with Chaucer's relief from official duties in 1385. Shortly after 1387 Chaucer was probably engaged on the *Canterbury Tales;* and it seems unlikely that he should have undertaken the inferior work after the happier idea had come to him. Were we entirely certain that Deschamps's *Lay de Franchise* was in Chaucer's mind as he wrote, the possible period of composition might be still further limited; for we know that the *Lay* was composed for May-day, 1385. On the assumption that this was one of the poems sent to Chaucer by the hands of Clifford, together with the balade addressed to Chaucer, a very ingenious argument has been built up to prove that its transmission

[1] The fact recently pointed out by Dr. J. S. P. Tatlock in *Modern Philology*, 1. 324–329, that Chaucer's petition for relief was presented by the Earl of Oxford, does not necessarily invalidate this conjecture.

took place early in 1386.[1] All probabilities lead us to assume that the Prologue was composed between the summers of 1385 and 1386. It is not improbable that some of the individual legends may have been composed at an earlier date;[2] but for this conjecture there is no sufficient proof.

A further problem of chronology is presented by the fact that the Prologue to the *Legend of Good Women* has come down to us in two different versions. Our discussion hitherto has been confined to the longer of the two versions, which recent editors have designated by the letter B, to distinguish it from the shorter version contained in a single manuscript (MS. Gg 4. 27 of the Cambridge University Library), designated by the letter A. That both of these versions are from Chaucer's own hand, no one has doubted; but which is the earlier of the two, and what relation they bear to each other, is a question which, after much argument, has never been satisfactorily answered. The A version contains 90 lines not found in B, lacks 124 lines which B contains, presents a transposition of several important passages, and numerous slight alterations in individual lines. All critics, I believe, agree that the A version is, æsthetically considered, inferior to B, and that in it the identification of Alcestis with Queen Anne is much less clear, if, indeed, the identification exists in it at all. A omits entirely the couplet quoted above, in which the poem is expressly dedicated to the queen.

The Two Versions of the Prologue.

From the argument of æsthetic superiority it is not safe to draw any conclusions as to the priority of either

[1] J. L. Lowes, in *Publications of the Modern Language Association*, 20. 753–779 (1905). The argument involves so many unproved hypotheses, that, while admiring its shrewdness, one fails to be fully convinced.

[2] See the article by J. L. Lowes cited above, pp. 802–818.

version, for a work of art is as often marred as mended in remodeling; but that a loyal subject, and dependent of the court, should draw a highly flattering allegorical portrait of his queen, and then deliberately revise his work so as to efface the portrait, is hard to believe. Such an act would require an extraordinary occasion; and it cannot be shown that such an occasion ever existed. The queen's death and her husband's sentimental destruction of the palace in which she died might well cause the withdrawal of the couplet of dedication, but it can hardly explain the blurring of her portrait. The strongest argument for the priority of B is founded on the fact that this version shows more immediate indebtedness to the French marguerite poems than does A. It is urged that in a revision, particularly if this revision were undertaken at a period considerably later than the original composition, when time had somewhat dulled the poet's recollection of the poems which had served as his models, the traces of indebtedness would tend to disappear. If, however, the second version was executed very soon after the first, the argument loses much of its force.

It is impossible here to enter into all the points of the argument, *pro* and *con*, and the present writer cannot pretend to settle so vexed a question; but he may be permitted to say that, after a rather careful examination of the controversy, the probabilities seem to him to favor the theory that A is the earlier version, and that B represents a revision, undertaken soon after the original composition, which had as its purpose the desire to turn the poem into a clear compliment to the queen.[1]

[1] The argument for the priority of B is ably presented by Dr. Lowes in the articles several times cited above (*Publications of the Modern Language Association*, 19. 593–683 and 20. 749–864). Dr. Lowes dates B,

The Plan of the Poem.

After a long May-day spent in the fields, Chaucer falls asleep on a flower-strewn bed in his garden arbor, and dreams a dream. In this vision of the night appears to him the Queen Alcestis, dressed as a daisy, led by the god of love himself.

There follows a band of nineteen ladies in royal habit, and after them a countless throng of ladies who were true in love. The god of love is wroth at Chaucer. Has he not written a translation of the *Roman de la Rose*, has he not told the tale of Criseyde, and thus thrown discredit on the name of woman, and shown himself a heretic to the cult of love? Alcestis, the ever gracious, intercedes in his behalf. Has he not also written the *Book of the Duchess*, the *Parliament of Fowls*, and the Life of St. Cecilia, wherein woman is glorified? Has he not written

> Many an ympne for your halydayes,
> That highten Balades, Roundels, Virelayes;
> And for to speke of other holynesse,
> He hath in prose translated Boëce.

Surely he may be easily forgiven if he will undertake as penance to sing

> Of wommen trewe in lovinge al hir lyve,

and of the wicked men who have proved false to them.

1386, and A, 1394. His argument is colored throughout by the fact that he declines to admit in either version the identification of Alcestis with Queen Anne. The latest and fullest argument for the priority of A is given by Dr. J. C. French in a dissertation on *The Problem of the Two Prologues to Chaucer's Legend of Good Women*, Baltimore, 1905. Those who wish to enter into the earlier stages of the controversy may consult Dr. French's chapter on 'The History of the Problem,' pp. 3–10, where a full critical bibliography is given. Particular attention must be called to Ten Brink's article, 'Zur Chronologie von Chaucer's Schriften,' in *Englische Studien*, 17. 1–23, which maintains the priority of B, and to Mr. J. B. Bilderbeck's *Chaucer's Legend of Good Women*, London, 1902, which argues for the priority of A.

The finished poem, then, was to have consisted of the Prologue, followed by the legends of the nineteen ladies who form Alcestis's train, and concluded by the story of Alcestis herself. But Chaucer had a sad habit not unknown to us moderns, of undertaking a large task with boundless enthusiasm, and of tiring of it before the task was half performed. He wrote nine legends (the last unfinished), praising the virtue of ten of the noble ladies, and then the new and the better idea of the Canterbury pilgrimage took possession of his mind. With the intellectual impatience so characteristic of him, he started on the fresher task; and though intending to finish the *Legend*, as shown by his reference to it in the Prologue to the *Man of Law's Tale*, he laid it one side to wait for the more convenient day which never came. It is easy to see why the work was put aside. Charming as the Prologue is in its kind, it is after all only a dream, and forever inferior to the human reality and broad sweep of the Prologue to the *Canterbury Tales*. Moreover, since the tales were all to be told by the poet himself, there was no opportunity for the dramatic variety offered by the Canterbury pilgrimage. Lastly, and most important, the very nature of the plan involved inevitable monotony — all the stories were to be of true women, faithful though abandoned in love, and all were to be drawn from the realm of classical antiquity.

As Professor Lounsbury has pointed out, one can trace in the successive sections of the work the poet's growing tedium. Even as he wrote the last lines of the Prologue, he began to be oppressed with the magnitude of his undertaking. The god of love warns him: —

> 'I wot wel that thou mayst nat al hit ryme,
> That swiche lovers diden in hir tyme;

It were to long to reden and to here;
Suffyceth me, thou make in this manere,
That thou reherce of al hir lyf the grete,
After thise olde auctours listen to trete.
For whoso shal so many a storie telle,
Sey shortly, or he shal to longe dwelle.'

A similar note recurs in the first of the legends: —

The wedding and the feste to devyse,
To me, that have ytake swiche empryse
Of so many a storie for to make,
Hit were to long, lest that I sholde slake
Of thing that bereth more effect and charge:
For men may overlade a ship or barge;
And forthy to th' effect than wol I skippe,
And al the remenant, I wol lete hit slippe.

Other hints of weariness may be found frequently in the legends;[1] but quite unmistakable are the following lines from the *Legend of Phyllis*: —

But for I am agroted heerbiforn
To wryte of hem that been in love forsworn,
And eek to haste me in my legende,
Which to performe god me grace sende,
Therfor I passe shortly in this wyse.

With such a warning, one is not surprised to find the next legend broken off abruptly in the middle of a sentence. One curious slip on the poet's part gives further proof that his heart was not in the work. In the *Legend of Ariadne*, at line 2075, we are told that Theseus was but twenty years and three of age; only twenty lines farther on Ariadne suggests that her sister be wedded to Theseus's son.

On the basis of the lists of heroines given in the balade introduced into the Prologue, and in the Prologue to the *Man of Law's Tale*, Professor Skeat sur-

[1] See ll. 1002–1003, 1552–1553, 1565, 1679, 1692–1693, 1921, 2257–2258, 2470–2471, 2490–2491, 2513–2515.

mises that the remaining legends were to have dealt with Penelope, Helen, Hero, Laodamia, Lavinia, Polyxena, Deianira, Hermione, and Briseis: but since the two lists are not in accord, we may well believe that Chaucer's mind was never clearly made up on the matter.

The peculiar charm of the Prologue to the *Legend of Good Women* is in part the charm of spring-time and out-of-doors, in part the charm of noble womanhood as figured in the fair Alceste, and even more the buoyant joyfulness of new-won freedom, as of an Ariel set free. First we see the poet, Chaucer, himself in his daily life — in the study and in the fields. Though he is no deep scholar, he modestly confesses, it is his surpassing delight to read books, — The Prologue.

> And to hem yeve I feyth and ful credence,
> And in myn herte have hem in reverence
> So hertely, that ther is game noon
> That fro my bokes maketh me to goon,
> But hit be seldom, on the holyday.

Though a book-lover, Chaucer is no book-worm. There is one attraction more potent than that of 'olde bokes' — the beauty of nature in the fair spring-time.[1] But when we speak of Chaucer's love of nature, we must be careful not to confuse this with the love of nature which marks more modern poets. Nowhere in his works is there any suggestion that he cared for the wilder beauty of mountains and rocks and surging sea. We never hear that he spent a summer in Wales, or Cornwall, or the Scottish Highlands. In his journeys to Italy he must surely have caught a glimpse of the Alps; but never does he sing of cloud-capped peak or snowy

[1] Chaucer's picture of Maytide is, of course, largely influenced by the conventionalities of the French love-allegories: but his poetry is so spontaneous in its enthusiasm that we may safely assume that the convention chimed with his own natural feeling.

summit. In the *Franklin's Tale* the story demands a description of the rocky coast of Brittany; but the rocks are thought of as terrible and destructive rather than as beautiful. They even cause Dorigen to doubt the benevolence of their Creator: —

> Eterne god, that thurgh thy purveyaunce
> Ledest the world by certein governaunce,
> In ydel, as men seyn, ye nothing make;
> But, lord, thise grisly feendly rokkes blake,
> That semen rather a foul confusioun
> Of werk than any fair creacioun
> Of swich a parfit wys god and a stable,
> Why han ye wroght this werk unresonable? [1]

Once only does Chaucer give a sweeping view from hill or mountain-side: —

> Ther is, at the west syde of Itaille,
> Doun at the rote of Vesulus the colde,
> A lusty playne, habundant of vitaille,
> Wher many a tour and toun thou mayst biholde,
> That founded were in tyme of fadres olde,
> And many another delitable sighte,
> And Saluces this noble contree highte.[2]

What appeals to Chaucer in the view is the fertility of the plain, and the evidence of prosperous human life furnished by 'many a tour and toun.' As for Mt. Vesulus itself, he dismisses it with the single epithet 'colde.' The tale of Constance offers abundant opportunity for describing the beauty and grandeur of the sea; but the opportunity is not improved. It is merely the 'wilde see,' or the 'salte see,' thought of as dangerous and cruelly malignant. What Chaucer, and the men of the Middle Ages in general, loved in nature was the peaceful and gentle, the beneficent to human life. The beauty of a May dawning, the song of birds, the fairness of the daisy, the gentle sweep of a green meadow, the long avenues of a well-kept forest — these

[1] F 865–872. [2] E 57–63.

were the charms which could lure Chaucer from his books and make him happy for a long summer's day. It is hard for us, bred and born in the atmosphere of romanticism, to sympathize with such a choice, to understand why one of the most beautiful of Alpine passes should have received the name of Mala Via, the 'bad road;' and yet who shall say that love of the kindly and beneficent is not as sane and reasonable as romantic enthusiasm for the desolate and destructive?

Following on the description of Chaucer's daily life comes the dream-vision itself. In this charming vision one may notice the skill with which the poet paints a wide and crowded scene without any confusion or distraction of attention from its central figures. Though the long description of the beauty of a May meadow belongs to Chaucer's waking experience and not to the dream,[1] the memory of it is so fresh in the reader's mind that no further painting of background is necessary; and the dream begins at once with the entrance of the god of love, and of the queen whom he is leading by the hand. They, as the central figures of the scene, are described with all beauty of detail, the noble womanhood of Alcestis dominating all about her. Then, after the balade has been sung, our attention is diverted to a definite number of attendants, the nineteen ladies. They are in 'royal habit,' but beyond this single touch they are not described. From them we turn to a vast company without number, and the whole scene is filled with beauty and goodness. But suddenly the whole throng ceases its motion; all kneel and sing with one voice: —

> 'Hele and honour
> To trouthe of womanhede, and to this flour
> That berth our alder prys in figuringe!'

[1] We are speaking of the B version.

Once more our whole attention is brought back to the object of this adoration, and the action of the dream proceeds uninterrupted to the end.

Beyond all this beauty of nature and of fair vision, there is the spirit of health and free-hearted joy pervading the whole poem, which is too subtle for analysis, and fortunately needs no service of the critic.

Into the Prologue Chaucer threw all the enthusiasm of his art; but the legends which it introduces were written, as we have seen, half-heartedly. Though the tales are well and gracefully told, and much more than mere imitations of classical authors, many readers, I think, will fail to read them through. We are conscious of a 'hidden want,' the want of Chaucer's own participant enthusiasm. Anything which has been hastily and reluctantly written will be hastily and reluctantly read. There are a few passages of fine description, such as the highly animated account of the sea-fight at Actium in the *Legend of Cleopatra* (a description which suggests the tournament scene in the *Knight's Tale*), or the description of the hunt and ensuing thunder-storm in the *Legend of Dido;* there is true pathos in the story of Lucretia, and real lyric passion in the lament of forsaken Ariadne; and yet we feel that the legends are in the main creditable productions rather than inspired poems. Perhaps the *Legend of Thisbe* comes nearest to being real poetry.

The Nine Legends.

CHAPTER IX

THE CANTERBURY TALES, GROUP A

EXCELLENT as is the quality of Chaucer's earlier work, — rich in characterization, in humor, in pathos, in essential poetry, — it is in the *Canterbury Tales*, and in them alone, that we find the full measure of Chaucer's greatness. In their endless variety of beauty and charm they themselves are Chaucer. To attempt any critical appreciation of the *Canterbury Tales* as a whole is to discuss the literary art of Chaucer, and that has already been attempted in an earlier chapter. Detailed estimates of the individual tales will be found in the pages which follow. All that remains for consideration here is the happy device by which the several tales are bound together into an artistic whole.

All the world loves a good story; and long before the days of Chaucer, collections of short tales in prose or verse were popular in Europe and in the Orient. Very often, too, an attempt was made to give to such compilations a sort of collective unity, either by community of theme, as in the *Legend of Good Women* and the *Monk's Tale*, or better by some framework story, as in the great collection known as the *Arabian Nights*. The *Confessio Amantis* of Gower is merely a vast treasure-house of stories bound together somewhat clumsily by the device of a lover's confession to the priest of Venus, the stories being told by the confessor as examples and admonitions to his penitent. Early in the fourteenth century we have in English a collection of fifteen tales

The Framework.

unified by an enveloping plot in the *Proces of the Sevyn Sages*. Most famous, perhaps, of such collections of stories is the *Decameron* of Boccaccio; and though, in all probability, Chaucer was unacquainted with this work, it is interesting to compare the way in which the two foremost of fourteenth century story-tellers gave unity to their work. In Boccaccio a company of ten young men and women of high social standing flee from plague-stricken Florence to a country estate, the property of one of them, and pass their days in telling stories. On each of ten days a story is told by each of the company, the stories of each day dealing with the same general theme. Connecting links describe the other diversions with which the days are filled.

Chaucer's device of a springtime pilgrimage to Canterbury has several advantages over that of Boccaccio. In the democracy of travel it was possible to bring together quite naturally persons of varied occupations and of diverse social rank, from the Knight to the Plowman, and in consequence to give to the stories a greater variety in theme and manner than is possible in the *Decameron*. Moreover, the motley complexion of the company and the adventures of a journey give rise to many humorous encounters, which add greatly to the realism of the whole. With constant change of scene, and with wide range of human characters, tedium is impossible; and the reader enters at once into the exhilarating spirit of travel and holiday.

The Nine Groups of Tales.

Had Chaucer carried out his original plan for the *Canterbury Tales*, the Prologue describing the gathering at the Tabard Inn would have been followed by sixty tales, two by each of the pilgrims including Chaucer himself, each introduced by its own prologue. The connecting links between the tales would have kept us informed of the

progress of the journey, where the nights were spent, where dinner was taken, of all the little happenings of the way. Then would have followed an account of the arrival in Canterbury and of the doings of the company while there. Sixty more tales, with their connecting links, would have brought us back to Southwark; and a concluding section would have described the supper given to him who should be judged the best *raconteur*. Of this grand scheme Chaucer completed less than a quarter. The plan was modified in the course of execution to *one* tale from each pilgrim on the way to Canterbury, and one on the return; but in the work as we have it, many of the pilgrims are never called upon, and the company never reaches Canterbury, though it gets within sight of its towers. Even the stories which we possess do not form an orderly sequence. We have the first tale told, the Knight's, and the last, the Parson's; but between the beginning and the end there are eight gaps which should have been filled with tales, or with connecting links; so that we have not a fragment of the whole, but nine separate fragments, the longest of which contains seven connected tales, and the shortest but one. These fragments are usually spoken of as groups, and are for convenience designated by the letters of the alphabet from A to I. Further confusion is caused by the fact that in the various manuscripts of the *Canterbury Tales* the order of the tales is different, even the integrity of the several groups or fragments not being always preserved. But the references in the link-poems enable us to constitute the groups; while the geographical references to the towns through which the pilgrims pass make it possible to determine with certainty the relative position of all but one of the nine groups. The group, of the position of which we are not certain, has been assigned by Mr. Furnivall to the third place in

the series, and has therefore been denominated Group C. Its assignment to this position, though based on the slightest evidence, has been generally accepted as a convenient practical disposition of the case.

The Journey to Canterbury.

Fragmentary as is the work, we are none the less able to piece out its allusions to places and time with what we know independently of the usual procedure of pilgrims to the shrine of St. Thomas, and thus to reconstruct with some degree of probability the route followed by Chaucer's pilgrims, and the time taken by them upon their journey.

Though it was possible, when demanded by urgent business, to make the journey in much less time, it was the usual custom for pilgrims to spend four days in going from London to Canterbury, the recognized stopping-places for the night being Dartford, Rochester, and Ospringe, thus dividing the journey into three easy stages of about fifteen miles each, with a short stint of ten miles for the last day. Roads were rough and heavy, so bad that wheeled vehicles were usually impracticable; and progress was necessarily slow and fatiguing. In the case of the pilgrimage which Chaucer describes, there were many reasons why the ordinary rate of travel should not be exceeded. There were three women in the company, and several of the pilgrims, notably the Clerk and the Shipman, were but ill mounted; April, 'with his shoures sote,' had made the roads heavy with mud, as we know from the Host's assertion (B 3988) that he was so bored by the tale of the Monk that, save for the clinking of the bells on the Monk's bridle, he would certainly have fallen down for sleep,

> Although the slough had never been so depe;

lastly, the journey was being taken mainly for pleasure, and half the fun of a vacation is to take your time.

At the beginning of Group B, which, as we shall see, occupies the second day of the pilgrimage, we are told that the date is April 18. It is on the evening of April 16, then, that Chaucer enters the spacious hostelry of the Tabard, and finds the nine-and-twenty who are to be his fellow-voyagers. Allowing for the change in the calendar, April 16 corresponds to April 24 in our reckoning, and at that date, in southern England, the sun rises about quarter of five, and sets about quarter past seven. Early on the morning of April 17, at break of day, the Host awoke his guests, and gathering them into a flock, led them forth at an easy jog, 'a litel more than pas,' the Miller playing his bagpipes the while, till they came to the little brook which crossed the Canterbury way, called St. Thomas-a-Watering. Here the cuts are drawn, and the Knight begins his tale. By the time his tale is ended, the musical Miller is so drunk that 'unnethe upon his hors he sat.' Southwark ale, we are told, is responsible for his condition. He is not too drunk, however, to tell his churl's tale, at the conclusion of which the company has nearly reached Greenwich, and the hour is half past seven (half-way pryme). The *Reeve's Tale* next follows, and after that the fragment of the *Cook's Tale*, of which 'tale maked Chaucer na more.' Here ends Group A; and the rest of the tales of the first day are silence. The night is probably spent at Dartford, fifteen miles from London.

Either the start next day is delayed, or the story-telling postponed; for it is already ten o'clock of April 18, when the Host reminds his friends that a fourth part of the day is gone, and that they are wasting time. Group B is the longest consecutive series of tales, and since near the end of it, in the *Monk's Prologue*, the Host says, 'Lo! Rouchestre stant heer faste by!' and since Rochester was probably the stopping-place for the

second night, it may be that we have the full stint of tales for the second day. Rochester is thirty miles from London.

There is nothing to determine the place of Group C. Mr. Furnivall thinks the Pardoner's desire for cakes and ale more appropriate to the morning, and hence assigns it conjecturally to the morning of the third day.

It was usual for pilgrims to dine on the third day at Sittingbourne, ten miles from Rochester; and since in the *Wife of Bath's Prologue* the Summoner promises to tell two or three tales about Friars before they come to Sittingbourne, and at the end of his story says, 'My tale is doon, we been almost at toune,' it is reasonable to assign Group D to the morning of the third day. Group E, which contains a playful allusion to the Wife of Bath, is probably to be assigned to the afternoon of the same day, during which the party rides six miles to Ospringe, where the next night is spent.

Near the beginning of the *Squire's Tale*, which with the *Franklin's* constitutes Group F, the Squire says (F 73):—

> 'I wol nat tarien yow, for it is pryme.'

Since, then, the time of day is nine of the morning, this group has been assigned to the morning of the fourth day. The position of Group G is clearly determined by the opening lines of the *Canon's Yeoman's Prologue*:—

> Whan ended was the lyf of seint Cecyle,
> Er we had riden fully fyve myle,
> At Boghton under Blee us gan atake
> A man, that clothed was in clothes blake.

A little farther on we are told that the Yeoman had seen the jolly company ride out of their hostelry in the morning, and that he and his master had ridden fast to overtake them. Measuring back five miles from the

little village of Boughton-under-Blean, we get Ospringe as the town from which they had set out in the morning. From Boughton the road leads through the Forest of Blean, a favorable place for robbers, and unwillingness to ride through so dangerous a place alone may account for the Canon's desire to join the larger company.

It is at a little town, —

> Which that ycleped is Bob-up-and-doun, —

that Group H begins. Antiquarians are not agreed in their identification of this village with the picturesque name; but the village of Harbledown, just out of Canterbury, seems best to answer the requirements. It is not yet noon, for the Cook, too drunk to tell the tale demanded of him, is reproached for sleeping 'by the morwe.' The Manciple offers himself as a substitute; and it is his tale which constitutes Group H.

The *Parson's Tale* apparently follows immediately on the Manciple's, for in the first lines of the *Parson's Prologue* we read: —

> By that the maunciple hadde his tale al ended,
> The sonne fro the south lyne was descended
> So lowe, that he was nat, to my sighte,
> Degreës nyne and twenty as in highte.
> Foure of the clokke it was tho, as I gesse.

The difficulty, however, resides in the lapse of time. If it was still morning when the Manciple began his tale, how explain the fact that it is four o'clock at its conclusion? Because of this inconsistency in time, the *Parson's Tale* has been separated from the Manciple's and labeled Group I. When one remembers, though, the way time is made to gallop in Shakespeare at the demand of dramatic effectiveness, one wonders whether the inconsistency may not have been deliberately planned, so that the pilgrimage might end appropri-

ately as the shadows begin to lengthen. Personally I see no sufficient reason for making the division which Mr. Furnivall thinks necessary.[1]

What Chaucer would have done with his pilgrims after their arrival in Canterbury we shall never know; but a monk of Canterbury, nearly contemporary with Chaucer, has given us a *Tale of Beryn*, supposed to be the first tale of the journey back to London, told by the Merchant, the Prologue to which consists of a spirited account of the happenings in the cathedral town. This tale was first printed by Urry in his Chaucer edition of 1721, and has since been reprinted in 1876 by the Chaucer Society from a manuscript belonging to the Duke of Northumberland.

The Tale of Beryn.

On their arrival in Canterbury, the pilgrims go to the 'Cheker of the Hope' Inn, where the Pardoner at once makes friends with Kit the tapster, who gives him false hopes of her favor. The cathedral is, of course, the first attraction; and thither the company goes to make its offerings at the shrine. The gentles, after being sprinkled with holy water, pass directly to the shrine back of the high altar; but the Pardoner, the Miller, and other of the lewder sort, stare at the painted windows, and try to guess out the figures depicted in them, and to interpret the armorial bearings. One of them sees a man with a spear, which he takes for a rake. After kneeling at the shrine, praying, and hearing service, all proceed to buy pilgrim's tokens to set in their caps; but the Miller and Pardoner manage to steal some Canterbury brooches for themselves. Dinner passes by with much merry talk, and in the afternoon

[1] For the account of the journey to Canterbury and the time occupied therein, I have drawn on Furnivall's Temporary Preface to the Six-Text edition of the *Canterbury Tales*, § 3, and on Littlehale's *Some Notes on the Road from London to Canterbury in the Middle Ages*, Chaucer Society, 1898.

each follows his inclinations; the Monk takes the Parson and Friar to call on one of his friends; the Knight and the Squire inspect the walls and fortifications; the Wife of Bath and the Prioress walk in the garden (one wonders what common interests they found to talk about); the Pardoner once more seeks out the tapster Kit.

Supper is eaten in grand style, the gentles treating the rest to wine, after which the more respectable go to bed, while the Miller and the Cook sit up to drink. Again the Pardoner makes advances to Kit, which develop into a broad farce, of which the Pardoner is the unhappy dupe. At daybreak the company starts on its journey home, and the Merchant is called on for the first tale.

This, of course, is not Chaucer; but it is written in Chaucer's spirit, and is interesting as the work of one who, living in Canterbury, knew well how pilgrims usually disported themselves.[1]

Date of the Canterbury Tales.

For a work so composite in its character as the *Canterbury Tales* it is impossible to set any definite dates. Several of the tales now incorporated in the collection, we know positively, had been written by Chaucer before the great work was planned; and the same may be true of other tales of which we have no definite information. The *Legend of Good Women* was pretty certainly begun in 1385 or 1386, and was probably left unfinished because of the poet's greater interest in his larger work. It is safe to say, then, that the idea of the *Canterbury Tales* was conceived not much before 1387, and that Chaucer continued to work at its execution intermittently until the time of his death. In the year 1387, April 16 fell on a

[1] Chaucer's disciple Lydgate also wrote a tale for the journey back, which is entitled *The Tale of Thebes.*

Tuesday, which would bring the pilgrims to Canterbury on Saturday, and since no mention is made of Sunday on the pilgrimage, it has been argued that Chaucer had the year 1387 in mind. But surely this is holding the poet down rather closely to the actual. If, however, we must have a precise date, 1387 has more in its favor than any other.

THE PROLOGUE

If we set aside the wonderful felicity of phrase and the sparkling humor which are common to nearly all of Chaucer's maturer compositions, the peculiar greatness of the *Prologue* may be said to reside in the vividness of its individual portraiture, and in the representative character of the whole series of portraits as a true picture of English life in the fourteenth century.

To the uncritical mind the value of a portrait depends on its likeness to the original, the fidelity with which it reproduces the peculiar traits of some individual man. Here, as in most things, the opinion of the man in the street is not to be lightly set at nought; if the portrait lacks fidelity to its original, it ceases to be a portrait at all. On the other hand, if it does no more than reproduce the individual, it falls short of true art. A photograph may be a perfect likeness, and at the same time supremely uninteresting to all but the friends of the sitter; the portraiture of a true artist is interesting to all people and to all ages. We look at Rembrandt's portrait of Dr. Tulp, and are immediately convinced of its lifelikeness. Though we never have seen the original, the marked individuality of the portrait, the peculiarities of feature and expression, convince us of its truth. But there is more in the portrait than the individual anatomist of long ago. The eager passion to learn and teach, the quick play of intelligence, the

unassuming authority of pose and gesture, betray the scientist. We behold not only the individual, but the type; the abstract type is made visible and real as embodied in the individual. This, the end and aim of true portrait-painting, is true in its measure of all high art. The true ideal is to be sought in and through the actual. However high we may tower into the region of the universal, we must plant our feet firmly on the actual; and the actual is of necessity individual.

It is by their successful blending of the individual with the typical that the portraits of Chaucer's *Prologue* attain to so high a degree of effectiveness. The Wife of Bath is typical of certain of the primary instincts of woman, but she is given local habitation 'bisyde Bathe,' a definite occupation of cloth-making, and is still further individualized by her partial deafness and the peculiar setting of her teeth. A wholly different type of womanhood, the conventional as opposed to the natural, is furnished by the Prioress. The description of the gentle lady abounds in minute personal, individual characteristics, physical and moral; yet all these individualizing traits are at the same time suggestive of that type which finds fullest realization in the head of a young lady's school, who fulfills in our modern life precisely the function of the prioress of the Middle Ages. What is true of these two is true of all the personages of the *Prologue*. The details enumerated nearly always *suggest* at once the individual and the type, as in the splendid line about the Shipman: —

> With many a tempest hadde his berd been shake.

It is the individual character of the several portraits which gives to the *Canterbury Tales* its dramatic realism and lifelikeness. Their universal character makes the *Prologue*, and indeed the whole body of the work,

a compendium of human life as it passed before the eyes of Geoffrey Chaucer. It is as a representative assembly, a parliament of social and industrial England, that we may regard this Canterbury pilgrimage. Save for the very highest stratum of society, the lords of the realm, who are after all but the golden fringe of the garment, every important phase of life is represented. We do not, to be sure, see the artisan at his bench, the sailor on his ship, the lawyer pleading his case; that is, of course, dramatically impossible; but more than that, it is artistically less desirable. Chaucer has shown his personages away from their daily tasks, on a vacation; and, though the marks of the profession are still plainly discernible, it is their essential humanity which is emphasized; each is measured by the absolute standards of manhood.

The life of the Middle Ages lent itself particularly well to such a process of portraiture. Though the dawning of the Renaissance was beginning its emphasis of the individual, society was still organized on a communistic basis; life was less complex. Members of the various crafts were banded together in guilds and mysteries, each with its peculiar livery. Each member of a guild was conscious of himself as one of a body, its representative and type. To-day things are very different. In the so-called learned professions, perhaps, something of the old *esprit de corps* has survived. In the essentially communistic life of our universities, again, there may be found a strong, essentially mediæval feeling for the whole, and an approximation to a common type, so that one may speak of a typical Oxonian, a typical Yale undergraduate. But with the majority of us, the typical is lost in the individual as far as character goes, while in costume we dress, as far as possible, alike.

Chaucer's west-country contemporary, in the Prologue to *Piers Plowman*, has also painted a wide picture of human life. In his fair field full of folk, all sorts and conditions are seen side by side, the mean and the rich, 'working and wandering as the world asketh.' It is instructive to compare this picture, which some have thought responsible for suggesting Chaucer's, with the picture furnished by the Prologue to the *Canterbury Tales*. Langland, with his allegorical imagery of the heaven and hell which bound our little life on this side and on that, gains much in grandeur and impressiveness. Chaucer, with his individualized types, gains infinitely in reality and in human sympathy.

THE KNIGHT'S TALE

Early on the morning of April 17, 'whan that day bigan to springe,' the Host calls his company together, and at an easy gait they ride out of Southwark to the music of the Miller's bagpipes. When two miles have been traveled, and St. Thomas-a-Watering has been reached, the Host suddenly stops his horse, and reminds his guests of the agreement made overnight: —

> If even-song and morwe-song acorde,
> Lat see now who shal telle the firste tale.

The cuts are drawn; and, either by fortune or overruling providence, or perhaps by the manipulation of the Host, the lot falls to the Knight, whom every one feels should be the first to tell his story; and the *Canterbury Tales* begin with a high-wrought tale of chivalry and old romance.

Source.

Though Chaucer is here and there indebted to the *Thebais* of Statius for a bit of description, his great obligation for the *Knight's Tale* is to the *Teseide* of Boccaccio, from which he drew the whole outline of the story. Here, as in the case

of *Troilus*, he has as his model a highly artistic poem by one of the foremost authors of Italy; so that it becomes peculiarly interesting to see to what extent, and in what spirit, he has departed from his original.

Comparing Chaucer's version of the story with that of Boccaccio, the most striking fact is their disparity in length. Exclusive of the rimed *argomenti* which precede each of the twelve books, the *Teseide* comprises 9896 lines, or 1237 stanzas of *ottava rima*, while the *Knight's Tale* contains but 2250 lines — little more than a fifth the bulk of its original. Besides this ruthless use of the pruning-knife, one notices the abandonment by Chaucer of the division into twelve books, and with it of the conventional invocations of the Muses, of much of the mythological machinery, and, in short, of all the conventional ear-marks of the Virgilian epic. But more significant than these external changes are the modifications and omissions which Chaucer has made in the story itself. These can be best shown by giving a brief synopsis of Boccaccio's poem as it unfolds itself book by book.

Book I narrates in 1104 lines what Chaucer summarizes in a dozen: —

> How wonnen was the regne of Femenye
> By Theseus, and by his chivalrye.

Book II devotes 792 lines to the home-coming of Theseus, and to his expedition against Thebes, which results in the capture of Palemone and Arcita, and their condemnation to lifelong imprisonment. In the third book the real action of the story begins. After a year of imprisonment, the two kinsmen catch fatal sight of Emilia as she walks in her garden, but with Boccaccio it is Arcita who sees her first, not Palemone; while the Emilia of the Italian is not, like Chaucer's Emily,

so wholly unconscious that she has won the attention of the Theban captives. As Arcita, after his release, rides away from Athens, Emilia stands on a balcony and receives his impassioned farewell.

The whole of Book IV is devoted to Arcita, his love-longing in exile, his return to Theseus's court under the assumed name of Penteo. The sorrows of the love-lorn knight, which Chaucer passes over half humorously, are detailed by Boccaccio with all his native sentiment. Very characteristic is stanza 32, in which Arcita, who has come in his wanderings to Ægina, stands on the seashore all alone, and is comforted by the breeze which blows from Athens, the breeze which has been very near to Emilia. Book V, which brings the action up to the point of Theseus's intervention and the ordaining of the tournament, differs only slightly from Chaucer's story, save that the escape of Palemone is narrated in detail. In the following book the two kinsmen collect their champions; but instead of the two vivid descriptions of Emetrius and Lygurge, Boccaccio devotes four hundred lines to a catalogue of the heroes who take part on the two sides. Book VII is given up to the prayers of Arcita, Palemone, and Emilia, and to the description of the amphitheatre. In the description of the tournament, which fills Book VIII, Chaucer's superiority to his original is again evident. Instead of his brief but vigorous picture of the *mêlée*, the Italian furnishes a series of single combats between the champions of the two sides, warriors in whom the reader has no direct interest whatever. Meanwhile Emilia looks on, and feels her love go out now to the one kinsman, now to the other, according as the fortunes of the battle sway now this way, now that. In Book IX the victor Arcita is hurt to death through the device of Venus and her hell-sent fury. In place

of the brief, deeply pathetic speech in which Chaucer's Arcite takes leave of friend and loved one, Boccaccio, in Book X, draws a long death-bed scene, less effective because of its greater length. The 728 verses of Book XI are devoted to the funeral of Arcita, which is celebrated with elaborate games after Virgilian model. In the closing book, after an interval of only a few weeks, is solemnized the wedding of Palemone and Emilia.[1]

The *Teseide* is by no means a contemptible composition; but, considering the slightness of its plot, it is surely much too long. Nor is the essentially romantic, sentimental character of the tale in keeping with its elaborate epic machinery. In his great condensation, in his simplification, in all his changes of detail, Chaucer's superior literary discernment is plainly evident. What Chaucer has borrowed is the outline of the tale; the execution is mainly his own. Mr. Henry Ward has shown [2] that of Chaucer's 2250 lines, 270 are directly translated from Boccaccio, 374 are somewhat closely imitated, leaving three quarters of Chaucer's lines for which no parallel is found in Boccaccio.

The source of the *Teseide* has never been discovered. Boccaccio took many suggestions from the *Thebais* of Statius; but these are of minor importance. Scholars are inclined to believe that the ultimate source was a Greek prose romance of the Byzantine period, which may have reached Boccaccio in a Latin translation.

[1] In preparing this brief synopsis, I have made frequent use of the full outline of the poem given by Koerting in *Boccaccio's Leben und Werke*, pp. 594–615. The best edition of the *Teseide* is that given in vol. ix of *Opere Volgari di Giovanni Boccaccio*, ed. Moutier, Firenze, 1831.

[2] Temporary Preface to the Six-Text edition of the *Canterbury Tales*, p. 104.

A much vexed question of Chaucerian scholarship is that which concerns itself with the date of composition of the *Knight's Tale*. That Chaucer had already written the story of Palamon and Arcite before the *Canterbury Tales* was planned, we know beyond doubt from the passage in the Prologue to the *Legend of Good Women*, where the poet recites a list of the works in which he had spoken nobly of woman and of love: —

Date of Composition.

> And al the love of Palamon and Arcyte
> Of Thebes, thogh the story is knowen lyte.

Since the *Legend* is probably to be assigned to the year 1385 or 1386, the original *Palamon and Arcite* must have been written before that date; and, from its general community of theme and manner with *Troilus and Criseyde*, we shall be ready to assume that the two works were undertaken at about the same time, i. e. circa 1380–82. Each is a reworking of one of Boccaccio's youthful epics; in each we find the same blending of pathos and satirical humor. But we are struck at once by a startling difference in the way in which the original has been adapted in the two cases: *Troilus* is considerably longer than the *Filostrato*,[1] while in the *Knight's Tale* the bulk of the original has been reduced to one fifth.

This suggests at once the question how far Chaucer altered his earlier composition in adapting it to its present position in the *Canterbury Tales*. Tyrwhitt, whose mere guesses are to be treated with respect, thought it 'not impossible that at first it was a mere translation of the Theseida of Boccace.' This guess was taken up by Ten Brink and Koch in Germany, and developed into an elaborate theory, which has until recent years been pretty generally accepted. Ten Brink

[1] Cf. above, p. 103.

and Koch have shown that the *Knight's Tale* is not the only work in which Chaucer is indebted to the *Teseide* of Boccaccio. Fairly literal translations from the poem, all in the seven-line stanza, occur in the *Parliament of Fowls*, ll. 183–294 (sixteen stanzas), in *Anelida and Arcite*, ll. 1–70 (ten stanzas), and in *Troilus*, 5. 1807–1827 (three stanzas). On the basis of this fact, it has been argued that the original *Palamon and Arcite* was a faithful paraphrase of the *Teseide* in seven-line stanzas, written earlier than the three poems just mentioned; that Chaucer was dissatisfied with his work, and wished to suppress it; but that he utilized portions of it in other works, as indicated above, and later worked it over in a greatly abridged form for the *Knight's Tale*.[1]

The most obvious objection to this theory is that Chaucer could not have suppressed a work of such length and importance, even if he had had any good reason to do so. A more reasonable explanation of the matter is that the poem referred to in the *Legend of Good Women* was in metre and in scope essentially what we know as the *Knight's Tale;* that Chaucer recognized from the first the desirability of condensing his original; but that he incorporated several passages of the *Teseide*, not used in his version of the story, into other poems on which he was engaged at about the same time.[2]

The Knight's Tale.

The Knight has wandered far and wide, and has seen many cities of men, in Russia, in Asia, in Africa; but he has lived and traveled and fought in the fair dream of chivalry, —

[1] For a full statement of the argument, see Ten Brink's *Studien*, pp. 39–70, and the paper by Koch in *Englische Studien*, 1. 249–293. (Reprinted in English in *Essays on Chaucer*, pp. 357–415.)

[2] This is the opinion of Mr. F. J. Mather, 'On the Date of the Knight's Tale,' *Furnivall Miscellany*, pp. 301–313.

Trouthe and honour, fredom and curteisye;

he is as unworldly as his squire-son. As with Tennyson's Sir Percivale, —

All men, to one so bound by such a vow,
And women were as phantoms.

He tells no tale of his own wanderings, his own experience; he hardly deals with real men and women at all. His tale is of chivalrous ideals, of knightly encounters long ago, of men and women living as he has lived, in dream and fancy. Even these shadow dreams are hardly more than moving pictures in the rich and varied pageantry which constitutes the world of the knight-errant. The opening words of the tale, —

Whylom, as olde stories tellen us, —

carry us far away from present-day realities, far from the Tabard Inn and its varied company, into the land of story and of long ago. It is to ancient Athens and the days of Theseus that we are bidden go, but to an Athens which the student of classical archæology will hardly recognize. Though, in its simplicity and restraint, the story is by no means un-Hellenic, the manners and customs are for the most part those of mediæval chivalry; and we had best forget forthwith all we know of ancient Greece. Neither Chaucer nor his knight knew much, or recked much, of antiquarian lore.

If we are to read the *Knight's Tale* in the spirit in which Chaucer conceived it, we must give ourselves up to the spirit of romance; we must not look for subtle characterization, nor for strict probability of action; we must delight in the fair shows of things, and not ask too many questions. Chaucer can be realistic enough when he so elects; but here he has chosen otherwise.

Four characters only are brought before us with any prominence: Palamon, Arcite, Emily, and Theseus. Though not characterized subtly, as Troilus and Pandarus are characterized, Palamon and Arcite are more than mere lay-figures of the piece. Of necessity, the two kinsmen have much in common. They are sisters' sons; they bear identical armor; their lives have been spent in closest fellowship; they have sworn a knightly vow of perpetual brotherhood. It is not until the fair ideal of friendship is shattered by the stern reality of love that they realize their disparity. Then it is clear, in the debate which they hold over Emily, and in their subsequent actions, that relatively to one another Palamon is the dreamer, Arcite the man of action. It is Palamon who insists on the inviolability of their vow of friendship, and Arcite who, after an attempt at unworthy quibbling, comes out with the plain statement that

> Love is a gretter lawe, by my pan,
> Than may be yeve to any erthly man,

and who recognizes that, since they are both condemned to prison perpetually, the question of prior claim to Emily is one of purely academic interest. Partly as a result of opportunity, partly as a result of character, it is Arcite who determines the destiny of the two; while Palamon merely drifts with the current of circumstance. The same distinction is observed in Arcite's prayer to Mars for victory, the definite practical means to the attainment of his desires; while Palamon prays Venus for success in his love, leaving the means of its attainment to the providence of the heavenly synod. But in prowess in arms, and in chivalric courtesy, there is not a jot of superiority in either; and the reader of the tale, like Emily herself, is unable to decide on which he would wish the ultimate success to light. When

the action closes, and the dying Arcite betroths Emily to his kinsman-rival, friendship wins its final triumph over jealousy, and the two noble kinsmen remain in our memory not as dissimilar rivals, but as eternal friends, one and indivisible.

As for Emily, she is a fair vision of womanly beauty and grace, and little more. Only once in the whole story, and that when the story is more than half done, in her prayer to Diana, do we hear Emily speak. We think of her as she roams up and down in her garden on the fatal spring morning, gathering flowers 'to make a sotil gerland for hir hede,' singing like an angel of heaven. We see her beauty and recognize her worth, realizing that the love of her may well be strong enough to break the friendship of a life; and yet we know her not at all. She is the golden apple of strife, and later the victor's prize; but, consciously and of her own volition, she never affects the action of the tale; she *does* nothing. When Fletcher in the *Two Noble Kinsmen* tried to develop her into a dramatic character, her inaction and indecision rendered her contemptible or absurd. Chaucer wisely kept her a vision and a name, letting us realize her character only in its effect upon others.

Theseus, the brave warrior, the man of anger, who is yet able to turn anger to justice when persuaded of the right, who can good-naturedly see the absurdity of Palamon and Arcite, yet tolerantly remember that

> A man mot been a fool, or yong or old,

and that he too had been a lover in his youth, is the most actual personage in the tale. He is, moreover, the motive power of the plot; his acts and decisions really determine the whole story.

It is not in the characterization, but in the descrip-

tion, that the greatness of the *Knight's Tale* resides. The poem opens with the brilliant pageant of the victorious home-coming of Theseus, thrown into sharp contrast by the band of black-clad widowed ladies who meet him on the way. A never-to-be-forgotten picture is that of Emily roaming in her garden, while the kinsmen look down upon her through thick prison-bars. The meeting and silent encounter of the cousins in the wood, the great theatre with its story-laden oratories, the vivid portraits of Emetrius and Lygurge, all the varied bustle of preparation, the vigorous description of the tournament itself, — these, with occasional passages of noble reflection, form the flesh and blood of the poem, of which the characters and the action are merely the skeleton framework. The *Knight's Tale* is preëminently a web of splendidly pictured tapestry, in which the eye may take delight, and on which the memory may fondly linger. In the dying words of Arcite: —

> What is this world? What asketh men to have?
> Now with his love, now in his colde grave
> Allone, withouten any companye, —

the terrible reality of the mystery of life, its tragedy and its pathos, are vividly suggested; but it is only suggested, as a great painting may touch on what is most sacred and most deep.

It is this essentially pictorial character of the poem which accounts for the slight success of Fletcher's attempt to translate it into drama, the poetry of action. In the *Two Noble Kinsmen* the slenderness of the plot, and the inconsistency of the characters, which we have accepted without question in the *Knight's Tale*, become painfully apparent. The splendid effectiveness of silence, which Chaucer has utilized so artistically in the first appearance of Emily, and in the encounter

in the wood, is necessarily sacrificed to dramatic exigencies. The tournament is transacted off the stage, and the descriptions of the three oratories drop out altogether. A reading of Fletcher's drama is of the greatest help in enabling one to recognize the distinctive poetic qualities of Chaucer's narration; just as a comparison with Dryden's brilliant modernization of the tale will help one to realize the peculiar charm of Chaucer's simple, unassuming diction.

THE TALES OF THE MILLER AND THE REEVE

The Knight's long tale of love and chivalry won, as it deserved, universal approbation: —

> In al the route nas ther yong ne old
> That he ne seyde it was a noble storie
> And worthy for to drawen to memorie.

The Host, chuckling with delight over the successful beginning of his story-telling scheme, turns to the Monk and courteously asks him to tell 'sumwhat to quyte with the Knightes tale.' The choice of the Monk was dictated, doubtless, by the Host's punctilious regard for social rank, the worthy ecclesiastic being after the Knight the most dignified personage of the company. But since the Monk must of necessity tell a serious tale, which could not offer a sufficiently effective contrast to the Knight's, the poet, as overruling providence of the pilgrimage, devises an interruption of the Host's less artistic scheme by the obstreperous intrusion of the Miller; who, though so drunk that 'unnethe upon his hors he sat,' insists that he knows a 'noble tale,' with which to repay the Knight. The Host, as complete tavern-keeper, knows not only the deference to be paid to men of rank, but also the more delicate diplomacy of dealing with a drunken man. When his soft-spoken words of deprecation fail

to silence the unruly Miller, he recognizes that discretion is the better part of courtesy, and suffers him to proceed.

After making the quite unnecessary 'protestation' that he is drunk, — a fact of which he is convinced by the sound of his own voice, — he announces that his tale is to be of a carpenter and his wife, and of how a clerk made a fool of the carpenter. But this theme treads on the toes of another in the company. The General Prologue tells us of the Reeve that —

> In youthe he lerned hadde a good mister;
> He was a wel good wrighte, a carpenter.

So we are prepared for the change from the 'noble tale' of the Knight to the ribald tale of the Miller by an altercation between drunken Robin and the white-haired Osewold, who thinks the tale directed against himself. And when the Miller's tale is done, the wounded professional pride of the Reeve furnishes us with a companion tale of how two Cambridge students got the better of a cheating miller.

The tales of the Miller and the Reeve are so closely linked by this dramatic interlude, and are moreover so similar in spirit, that it will be convenient to treat them together.

Sources.

For neither of these tales do we possess Chaucer's immediate source; but there exist stories sufficiently like them to indicate that in neither case did Chaucer draw wholly on his own imagination. In the *Miller's Tale* we have a combination of two stories originally distinct — the story of a man who is made to believe that the great day of reckoning is at hand, represented by a German tale of one Valentin Schumann, printed in 1559, and the story of Absolon and Nicholas, to which an analogue is found in a collection of *novelle* by Massuccio di Salerno, who flour-

ished in the latter half of the fifteenth century. Other similar tales are found in German and in Latin.[1]

A tale similar to that of the Reeve is found in Boccaccio's *Decameron*, Day 9, Nov. 6; and still closer to Chaucer are two French *fabliaux* which are reprinted in the volume of *Originals and Analogues* published by the Chaucer Society.[2]

The point of strongest resemblance between the tales of the Miller and the Reeve is their extreme indecency, an indecency which cannot be wholly explained away as due to the frankness of a less delicate age. Chaucer, himself, was quite aware that to many of his readers these tales would be objectionable. Half seriously, half playfully, he prefaces them with an apology in which he warns away the squeamish, and at the same time disclaims any personal responsibility for the tales. The Two Tales

> What sholde I more seyn, but this Millere
> He nolde his wordes for no man forbere,
> But told his cherles tale in his manere;
> Me thinketh that I shal reherce it here.
> And therfore every gentil wight I preye,
> For goddes love, demeth nat that I seye
> Of evel entente, but that I moot reherce
> Hir tales alle, be they bettre or werse,
> Or elles falsen som of my matere.
> And therfore, whoso list it nat yhere,
> Turne over the leef, and chese another tale;
> . . . . . .
> Avyseth yow and putte me out of blame;
> And eek men shal nat make ernest of game.

[1] Those who wish to go farther with this not very profitable theme may consult the papers of R. Köhler, in *Anglia*, 1. 38–44, 186–188; 2. 135–136; of H. Varnhagen, in *Anglia*, 7. Anzeiger 81–85; of L. Fränkel, in *Anglia*, 16. 261–263; and of E. Kölbing, in *Zeitschrift für vergleichende Literaturgeschichte*, 12. 448–450; 13. 112. See also L. Proescholdt, in *Anglia*, 7. 117.

[2] Pp. 85–102. For a full discussion of the sources of the *Reeve's Tale*, see the paper by H. Varnhagen, in *Englische Studien*, 9. 240–266.

This is in effect a repetition of the disclaimer given in the General Prologue, ll. 725–742; what is its validity? That he must rehearse all the tales of all his pilgrims precisely as they were told, whatever their character, or else 'falsen som of his matere,' is precisely the argument by which the followers of Zola defend their ultra-realism. The simple answer to all this is found in the fact that the great poets have never conceived of their function as that of a mere photographer or stenographer. They 'imitate nature,' to be sure, but with a difference. If it is their duty to observe, it is also their duty to select, to adapt, to idealize. It would have been perfectly possible to give a true picture of the varied humanity which made up the Canterbury pilgrimage, without suffering these churls to tell their 'cherles tales,' which no sophistry can elevate into true art.

I do not believe that Chaucer was in the least deceived by this argument. He deliberately chose to insert the tales, not as works of art, nor even as a necessary part of a great artistic whole, but merely as a diverting interlude. Making a rather considerable allowance for greater freedom of speech, they are tales of the sort which entirely moral men of vigorous nature have found diverting, and at which the less vigorous have always raised their eyebrows. Having chosen to insert the tales, he playfully answers the anticipated charges of the moralist, by assuring him that he wrote the tales unwillingly, compelled to do so by the higher moral consideration of strict truthfulness. Inasmuch as the *Canterbury Tales* are in the main truly great art, and as these tales are by their nature not true art, I think it unfortunate that Chaucer included them; but I am very far from considering them as evidence of immoral character in their author.

What I take to be Chaucer's serious defense of these tales is contained in a single line, which concludes the passage quoted above: —

> And eek men shal nat make ernest of game.

In other words, both these tales narrate practical jokes, and their comic interest depends on the clever working-out and complete success of the trick. In the *Miller's Tale*, for example, the attention is centred on the ludicrous gullibility of the jealous carpenter and the clever manœuvring of hende Nicholas, not on the immoral purpose for which the trick is devised. So in the *Reeve's Tale*, there is a sort of rough poetic justice in the complete discomfiture of the cheating miller; and on this, rather than on the immoral character of the retribution, the effectiveness of the story depends. It is not immorality for immorality's sake, but immorality for the joke's sake. Of course, this does not lessen the moral blame of the two Cambridge students, when seriously considered; but it very materially lessens the immorality of the story. It is only when the reader reverses the emphasis, when, in Chaucer's words, he makes earnest of game, that the tales become actively immoral.

In the *Miller's Tale*, in particular, the attention is diverted from the lustful and nasty features of the story, to the brilliant characterizations, and to the consummate skill with which the narrative is transacted. In none of Chaucer's tales is there more convincing proof of his mastery of the technique of story-telling. The tale consists of two comic intrigues combined into a single unity. It will be worth while to notice with some particularity the steps by which this end is attained.

Since Nicholas is to be the prime mover of the action, without whose machinations neither plot could have

matured, the first thirty-three lines of the tale are devoted to a vivid description of his person and personality. The carpenter, as passive centre of the plot, is next described more briefly. Nearly forty lines are then devoted to a description of Alisoun, whose attractiveness constitutes the *causa causans* for both intrigues. These portraits, and that of Absolon which follows a little later, are done with all the skill which marks the portraiture of the General Prologue. After another forty lines, in which the relations between Nicholas and Alisoun are established, the main action is fully launched, and the natural pause which ensues is utilized for the introduction of the second action. Absolon is described, and his persistent attentions to Alisoun are recorded, eighty-four lines sufficing to set the new intrigue afoot. Resuming the thread of the main argument, some two hundred and fifty lines are devoted to the clever scheme by which the carpenter is beguiled into believing that a second Noah's flood is toward, and the two lovers attain their end. Particularly rich in humor is the scene where Nicholas, in feigned trance, predicts the coming deluge, a prediction for which we have been artistically prepared by the earlier statement that all Nicholas's fancy 'was turned for to lerne astrologye.' Again there is a natural pause in the action, in which the story reverts to Absolon. Because the carpenter, in instant fear of the flood which is at hand, has kept all day to his house, Absolon is led to believe that he is from home, and consequently chooses this particular night to pay his addresses. He goes to Alisoun's window, where he is duped, and has his revenge. This section of the tale occupies about a hundred and sixty lines. Thirty-eight lines now suffice to end the tale. The frantic cry of 'Water!' uttered by Nicholas as a result of Absolon's revenge, wakes the sleeping carpenter, and,

fitting in with his expectation of a flood, leads him to cut the ropes which suspend his ark of safety, thus bringing about the catastrophe of the main action.

It is certainly a pity that such excellent skill was expended on a story which many of Chaucer's readers will prefer to skip; and yet, as we have seen, it is this very skill which does most to minimize the objectionable character of the tale.

THE COOK'S TALE

Whoever may have been offended at the freedom of the *Reeve's Tale*, jolly Hodge of Ware was not of the strait-laced sect: —

> The Cook of London, whyl the Reve spak,
> For joye, him thoughte, he clawed him on the bak,
> 'Ha! ha!' quod he, 'for Cristes passioun,
> This miller hadde a sharp conclusioun
> Upon his argument of herbergage!'

Perhaps, in his vocation of cook, he has had to do with cheating millers, and consequently finds special relish in the tale. He volunteers a 'litel jape that fil in our citee,' which is to deal, saving the presence of mine host, with a London 'hostileer.' After some playful allusions to the tricks of the culinary profession, the Host bids him proceed.

The tale of the Cook is a mere fragment, extending only to fifty-eight lines, and though we have a fine piece of portraiture in the picture of Perkin Revellour, who is to be the hero, and a fairly complete *mise en scène*, we have not enough of the story to form any guess as to its plot. We can only surmise that it is to be a 'merry' tale of the same general type as those of the Miller and the Reeve. Perhaps it was a recognition of the fact that three tales of this sort on end would be too large a dose of 'mirth' that caused the

poet to abandon it; for, as the old scribe says, 'Of this Cokes tale maked Chaucer na more.'

There is a spurious tale, certainly not by Chaucer, which some of the manuscripts, and the old editions, insert after this fragment under the title of *The Cokes Tale of Gamelyn;* but a discussion of this tale, which has some interest because of its relation to Shakespeare's *As You Like It*, is outside the scope of the present work.[1]

[1] The tale may be found in the appendix to vol. iv of Skeat's *Oxford Chaucer*. For a discussion of it, see the article by E. Lindner, in *Englische Studien*, 2. 94–114, 321–343.

CHAPTER X

THE CANTERBURY TALES, GROUP B

THE MAN OF LAW'S TALE

THE first day's journey had brought the band of pilgrims only fifteen miles on their way; and the night had been spent at the little town of Dartford in Kent.[1] Either the company had slept long and started late on the second day's ride, or the beauty of a sunny morning in mid-April had made the diversion of story-telling superfluous; for it is already ten o'clock when the Host suddenly turns his horse about, and reminds his fellow-voyagers that a fourth part of the day is already spent, and time is wasting. The Man of Law is called on to begin the entertainment of the day. As a lawyer, he is too well schooled in the law of contracts to refuse assent: —

> 'To breke forward is not myn entente.
> Bihest is dette, and I wol holde fayn
> Al my biheste; I can no better seyn;'

but since the tale he is minded to tell is in effect the legend of a good woman, he feels not unnatural hesitation in narrating it, when Chaucer, as all the pilgrims know, has written a whole volume of such legends.

> 'I can right now no thrifty tale seyn,
> But Chaucer, though he can but lewedly
> On metres and on ryming craftily,[2]

[1] Cf. p. 155.

[2] The depreciation of Chaucer's skill is to be considered a bit of the poet's half-humorous modesty, rather than as representing dramatically the opinion of the Man of Law.

Hath seyd hem in swich English as he can
Of olde tyme, as knoweth many a man.
And if he have not seyd hem, leve brother,
In o book, he hathe seyd hem in another.'

Hereupon follows a catalogue of women faithful in love whose stories Chaucer had narrated, or planned to narrate, in the *Legend of Good Women*, referred to here as the *Seintes Legende of Cupyde*. How shall he, the Man of Law, presume to rival such a master in this particular art? Ovid's story of the daughters of Pierus who dared contend with the Muses, and were for their presumption turned into chattering magpies, should give him pause: —

'But nathelees, I recche noght a bene
Though I come after him with hawe-bake;
I speke in prose, and lat him rymes make.'
And with that word he, with a sobre chere,
Bigan his tale, as ye shal after here.

Though many of the incidents of the tale of Constance are found in other, earlier stories, Chaucer's immediate source was the *Anglo-Norman Chronicle* of the Englishman, Nicholas Trivet, a voluminous English scholar and historian, who flourished in the first half of the fourteenth century.[1] Trivet's chronicle, written in the Anglo-Norman French of the English court, devotes a long section to the history of 'la pucele Constaunce,'[2] the account agreeing in all important details with that given by Chaucer. Chaucer has very considerably condensed the story, has

Sources.

[1] The *Dictionary of National Biography*, following the early biographers, Leland and Bale, gives the date of his death as 1328; but since his chronicle includes the reign of Pope John XXII, who died in 1334, the date is certainly wrong.

[2] As reprinted in *Originals and Analogues*, the story occupies 25 pages. The text is provided with a running summary and a translation in English (pp. 1–53).

added many original passages of a reflective or lyrical character, and has altered some of the minor details.[1] Thus, for example, Trivet narrates in detail how King Alla slew his mother with his own hands,[2] an episode which Chaucer has preferred to soften down into a mere vague statement. If the student will take the trouble to pick out Chaucer's original additions to the tale, as indicated in the foot-note, he will find that they comprise all the most beautiful passages in the tale. Thus, when Constance and her child are put to sea in the rudderless boat, Trivet merely says: 'The mariners with great grief commended her to God, praying that she might again return to land.' It is Chaucer who has added the sublimely beautiful lines (825–868) which show her noble resignation, and supreme trust in God. Of what wondrous pathos is the stanza: —

> Hir litel child lay weping in hir arm,
> And kneling, pitously to him she seyde,
> 'Pees, litel sone, I wol do thee non harm.'
> With that hir kerchef of hir heed she breyde,
> And over his litel yën she it leyde;
> And in hir arm she lulleth it ful faste,
> And into heven hir yën up she caste.

Chaucer's less gifted contemporary, John Gower, has also told the story of Constance in the second book of his *Confessio Amantis;* but that both poets went

[1] About 350 lines of the 1029 comprising the tale are not represented in Trivet. Four of the added stanzas (ll. 421–427, 771–777, 925–931, 1135–1141) are translated from the *De Contemptu Mundi* of Pope Innocent III, a work of which Chaucer tells us (Prologue to the *Legend of Good Women*, A version, ll. 414–415) that he had made a translation (now lost). One stanza (ll. 813–819) is from Boethius. The rest is Chaucer's own. Chaucer's additions comprise lines 190–203; 270–287; 295–315; 330–343; 351–371; 400–410; 421–427; 449–462; 470–504; 631–658; 701–714; 771–784; 811–819; 825–868; 925–945; 1037–1043; 1052–1078; 1132–1141.

[2] 'And with that he cut off her head and hewed her body all to pieces as she lay naked in her bed' (p. 38).

independently to Trivet is proved by the fact that each gives statements found in Trivet, but not found in the other. There are, however, a number of instances in which Chaucer and Gower narrate the same fact not found in Trivet; and this leads us to believe that in addition to using Trivet, one poet or the other made use of his contemporary's version.[1] Since we know from the excellent edition of Gower by Mr. G. C. Macaulay that the *Confessio Amantis* was first published in 1390, and not in 1382–85 as was formerly believed, while the date usually accepted for the inception of the *Canterbury Tales* is 1387, whatever borrowing there was, was done by Gower.[2] The case becomes all the stronger if we accept the theory which sees in the seven-line stanzas of the *Man of Law's Tale* proof that it was composed at a period considerably earlier than that of the *Canterbury Tales* as a whole.

The Man of Law's statement that he learned the story from a merchant is not to be taken seriously;

[1] For a full discussion of the question, see the papers by E. Lücke, 'Das Leben der Constanze bei Trivet, Gower, und Chaucer,' in *Anglia*, 14. 77–122, 147–185. 'On the basis of the comparison I have given, and of the passages cited in which, on the one hand Chaucer agrees with Trivet, and on the other hand Gower agrees with Chaucer, I believe it may be considered proved that Chaucer made use of Trivet and also of Gower' (p. 185).

[2] The establishment of the correct date for the first edition of the *Confessio Amantis* disposes effectually of the fanciful story of a falling out between Gower and Chaucer anent the tale of Constance, given at length by Professor Skeat in the *Oxford Chaucer*, vol. iii, pp. 413–414. Similarly, it is no longer possible to believe that ll. 77–89 of the introduction to the *Man of Law's Tale* are aimed at Gower, a belief for which there was never any satisfactory foundation. Though the tale of Canacee, there condemned, is told by Gower, it is also told by Ovid; and the tale of 'Tyro Apollonius' was widely current before Gower introduced it into the last book of his *Confessio Amantis*. Moreover, the particular episode of this last-named tale which the Man of Law finds so horrible is not given by Gower at all. Thus falls a fine-spun theory, which we are glad to know is false.

but it suggests, none the less, the way in which many mediæval tales were transplanted from one country to another.

The Tale as a Work of Art.

Looked at merely as a narrative, the tale has but little claim to greatness. It consists of a series of improbable episodes, bound together merely by the accident that they all happen to the same heroine. Though in the fact that the fleet which eventually saves Constance, and brings her back to Rome, had been dispatched by the emperor on a punitive expedition against the 'cursed wikked Sowdanesse,' we see an attempt to link the beginning of the tale with its close, there is too much of accident, and too little of direct causal connection, in the events of the tale to leave it any organic unity. The episode of the steward of the 'hethen castel,' who comes down to Constance's ship and tries to violate her, is in no way connected with what precedes or follows. The tale has all the structural defects of the typical romance or saint's legend.

What raises this legend into the realm of true art, and even gives to it a high degree of spiritual unity, is the wonderfully beautiful personality of Constance. There is little to be said of this character by way of analysis; there is no baffling problem of motives nor complexity of warring qualities to fascinate the intellect, no development of character under stress of circumstance; from the first she is utterly transparent, utterly perfect. We see her in prosperity, we see her in bitterest adversity, in what she believes to be the hour of her death; she is the same always, unmoved, unshaken. The great Christian virtues of humility, faith, hope, charity, sum up the whole of her nature; by these stars she steers her rudderless boat as she sails in the salt sea; by these she lives in the court of

emperor and king. So little is she moved by outward circumstance, that the mere events of the story sink into insignificance; we forget their improbability, or rather, in the presence of such superhuman perfection, the supernatural seems merely natural. Chaucer does not try to explain these miracles away; he accepts them frankly, even gladly: —

> Men mighten asken why she was not slayn?
> Eek at the feste who mighte hir body save?
> And I answere to that demaunde agayn,
> Who saved Daniel in the horrible cave?

Or again, 'Who kepte hir fro the drenching in the see?' Chaucer asks, and answers: —

> Who bad the foure spirits of tempest,
> That power han t'anoyen land and see,
> 'Bothe north and south, and also west and est,
> Anoyeth neither see, ne land, ne tree?'
> Sothly, the comaundour of that was he,
> That fro the tempest ay this womman kepte
> As wel whan that she wook as whan she slepte.

When we see her set adrift again with her 'litel sone,' weeping piteously over his distress though not her own, we are inevitably reminded of another *Mater Dolorosa*, the 'Moder and mayde bright, Marye,' to whom she prays. We are quite ready to agree with Ten Brink when he says: 'The heroine here appears almost a personification of Christianity itself, such as it comes to heathen nations, is maligned and persecuted, yet, in the strength of its Founder, endures in patience and finally remains victorious.'[1] Be it remembered, however, that she is more than a personification, a personality.

I fancy that we are often inclined to underestimate the art which is requisite to the depiction of such a

[1] *Hist. Eng. Lit.* (Eng. trans.) 2. 156.

figure as that of Constance. It is precisely in its simplicity, its absence of all complexity, that the difficulty of the portrayal resides. By 'character' we mean the markings or traits which distinguish one individual from another, or rather from our somewhat vaguely conceived 'normal' man or woman. In bidding us pattern our imperfect natures after the one perfect nature, Christianity bids us shake off our personal idiosyncrasies, the traits or markings — blemishes, if you will — which distinguish us from our pattern. It follows logically that, if we were able to carry out this Christian ideal, we should lose the distinguishing traits which constitute our character as individuals. Constance has attained the ideal; she is perfect; and consequently her 'character' seems to us shadowy or unreal. In a sense she has no character. To depict such a nature as this in its ideal perfection, and yet to make us feel the force of her personality, and love her and sympathize with her, to accomplish this, is a greater artistic triumph than to create a Criseyde. Chaucer is here working in the spirit of the Christian Middle Age, which loved the perfect, the universal; it was the Renaissance which taught us to set such store by the necessarily imperfect *individual*.

THE SHIPMAN'S TALE

The tale of Constance has given the lie to the Man of Law's modest statement that he knows no 'thrifty' tale. At its conclusion the Host rises in his stirrups with the exclamation: —

> 'This was a thrifty tale for the nones!'

He is apparently in the mood for 'thrifty' tales, for he turns next to the parish priest, the 'povre persoun of a toun,' and demands of him a tale. But he has

unfortunately larded his request with two of the oaths without which his tongue seldom wags; and the good parson is scandalized: —

> The Persone him answerde, '*ben'cite!*
> What eyleth the man so sinfully to swere?'

Such unreasonable objection to the picturesque in language can come only from a follower of the new sect of Wiclif. The Host makes no great pretense to religion; but he hates a heretic; he 'smells a loller in the wind,' and dreads a 'predicacioun' after the manner of Wiclif's itinerant preachers. There is another staunch upholder of orthodoxy in the person of the conscienceless Shipman.

> 'He shal no gospel glosen heer ne teche.
> We leve alle, in the grete god,' quod he.
> 'He wolde sowen som difficultee
> Or springen cokkel in our clene corn.' [1]

Such a calamity the Shipman stands ready to avert by telling a tale himself, which he promises shall be free from philosophy or other scientific lore. One need not dilate on the rich humor of this episode, wherein Chaucer chooses the Host and the Shipman as the bitterest opponents of heretical doctrine.

We do not know the immediate source of the *Shipman's Tale*. A similar story is found in the *Decameron*, Day 8, Nov. 1; but Chaucer's setting of the tale near Paris indicates that he derived it from a French *fabliau* now lost. Save for its general tone of loose morality, there is no special appropriateness in assigning the tale to the Shipman;

Sources.

[1] The term 'loller' or 'lollard,' derisively applied to the followers of Wiclif, probably means only a foolish talker; but it was popularly associated with the Latin *lollium*, tares, with reference to the parable of the tares sown among the wheat.

and the use of the first person pronoun plural in the passage beginning —

He moot *us* clothe, and he moot *us* arraye,

shows that it was originally intended for one of the female members of the company, who can have been no other than the Wife of Bath. Apparently Chaucer first wrote the tale for her, and then lighting on another story which should more fully reveal his conception of her character, utilized the rejected tale for the Shipman, forgetting to eliminate the inconsistent passage referred to above.

The Shipman's Tale.

Though much more delicate than the tales of the Miller and the Reeve, the tale of the Shipman is essentially more immoral. Hende Nicholas receives a righteous retribution for his deeds; and the two Cambridge students have at least a certain provocation for theirs. The Monk, Dan John, is false not only to his professions as a man of God, but violates also the sacred laws of hospitality and of common gratitude. He cultivates the friendship of the worthy merchant merely that he may live on him, and, not content with that, deliberately plays him false with his wife. With equal nonchalance he leaves the woman he has corrupted to extricate herself as best she can from an exceedingly embarrassing situation. The story ends with the laugh all on his side. The moral of the tale seems to be, as Mr. Snell has put it, 'that adultery is a very amusing and profitable game, provided that it is not found out.' The intrigue is, of course, a clever one, the actors are clearly characterized, and the narrative is well conducted; but neither the intrigue, nor the art of the tale, is brilliant enough to blind us, even partially, to the disagreeable picture of treachery and lust. The chief artistic merit

of the piece consists in the realistic picture it gives of a well-to-do *bourgeois* household, and of the business methods of a fourteenth-century merchant, such as Chaucer must have seen often at the London Custom House.

THE PRIORESS'S TALE

Very different is the tale of the gentle Prioress which follows. With all courtesy, the usually rough-spoken Host turns to Madame Eglantine: —

> 'My lady Prioresse, by your leve,
> So that I wiste I sholde yow nat greve,
> I wolde demen that ye tellen sholde
> A tale next, if so were that ye wolde.
> Now wol ye vouchesauf, my lady dere?'

And the courteous request meets with courteous assent.

As set forth in the General Prologue, Madame Eglantine's character is compounded of many affectations. Scrupulous in her dress and table manners, priding herself on her command of an antiquated Norman French which she supposes is still the French of fashionable society, in all things taking pains to 'countrefete chere of court,' she stands as the typical superior of a young ladies' school. Next to this quality of utter 'seemliness' comes the good lady's tenderness of heart:

> She wolde wepe, if that she sawe a mous
> Caught in a trappe, if it were deed or bledde.

As seen superficially at the Tabard Inn, she is distinctly likeable, but also a little ridiculous. The true measure of her character is to be found in the fuller revelation of her tale. She might have been expected to tell a courtly tale, which should establish her reputation as an accomplished woman of the world; but her affectations are only on the surface. Her legend of the 'litel clergeon' breathes the spirit of earnest, heart-

felt religion, and shows that the tenderness of her heart is not confined to the sufferings of a wounded mouse or a favorite lap-dog, but makes her keenly susceptible to the truest and deepest pathos. Instead of the calm assurance and self-confidence of a lady superior, we find in her invocation of the Blessed Virgin a sincere Christian humility: —

> 'My conning is so wayk, o blisful quene,
> For to declare thy grete worthinesse,
> That I ne may the weighte nat sustene,
> But as a child of twelf monthe old or lesse,
> That can unnethes any word expresse,
> Right so fare I, and therfor I yow preye,
> Gydeth my song that I shal of yow seye.'

To understand the spirit which gave rise to stories such as that told by the Prioress, we must think ourselves back into a time when the antipathy which some Christians now feel against the Jewish race on purely social grounds had all the force of a religious passion. 'His blood be on us and on our children,' shouted the multitude of Jerusalem; and the multitude of mediæval Europe felt it a sacred duty that the blood-guiltiness should be brought home to the self-cursed race. The pages of European history are stained with many stories of senseless persecution, which, though due doubtless in part to the fact that the Jews were rich while the Christians among whom they lived were poor, were possible only because of this mistaken religious zeal. Sources.

It is entirely possible that, stung into fury by these persecutions, the Jews may have sought revenge by the treacherous murder of Christian children. So widespread a belief in such a murderous practice could hardly have sprung up without some sort of foundation. But be that as it may, all Europe firmly believed

that, inspired by fierce hatred of Christ, the Jews, in Passion Week particularly, were in the habit of reënacting the scenes of the crucifixion, taking as their victim any Christian child whom they were able to decoy into their houses. If the child was not crucified, he was murdered outright, and his blood was used in some gruesome religious ceremony.

The earliest story of a Christian child murdered by Jews comes from the first quarter of the fifth century, and is narrated in Greek by the Church historian Socrates. As translated by Dr. James of Cambridge,[1] the story runs as follows: 'Now a little after this the Jews paid the penalty for further lawless acts against the Christians. At Inmestar, a place so-called, which lies between Chalcis and Antioch in Syria, the Jews were in the habit of celebrating certain sports among themselves: and, whereas they frequently did many foolish actions in the course of their sports, they were put beyond themselves (on this occasion) by drunkenness, and began deriding Christians and even Christ himself in their games. They derided the Cross and those who hoped in the Crucified, and they hit upon this plan. They took a Christian child and bound him to a cross and hung him up; and to begin with they mocked and derided him for some time; but after a short space they lost control of themselves, and so ill-treated the child that they killed him. Hereupon ensued a bitter conflict between them and the Christians.'

There seems to have been no recurrence of this crime, either in fact or in fiction, until the year 1144, when occurred the famous 'martyrdom' of St. William of

[1] *The Life and Miracles of St. William of Norwich*, by Thomas of Monmouth, edited by Jessopp and James, Cambridge, 1896, p. lxiii. To the Introduction of this volume I am indebted for much valuable information about the legend.

Norwich. According to the life of St. William, written a few years later by Thomas of Monmouth, a monk of Norwich Priory, William, who had from the first been distinguished for his sanctity, was at the age of twelve decoyed on Tuesday of Holy Week into a Jew's house in Norwich. Here on the following day he was crucified and pierced in the left side, a crown of thorns upon his forehead. On Good Friday his body was put in a sack and carried by the murderers to Thorpe Wood, where it was hanged to a tree. It was finally removed to the Monks' Cemetery in Norwich, where many miracles were wrought by its agency. That a boy named William was actually murdered in Norwich in 1144, and that his murder was attributed to the Jews, we can assert without question; whether or not any Jews were really concerned in the crime is open to serious doubt. The fame of his martyrdom, however, spread rapidly; and we begin to hear of similar boy-martyrs in England and on the continent. Of these the most famous is St. Hugh of Lincoln, alluded to by the Prioress at line 1874 of her tale, who, according to the chronicle of Matthew Paris, was murdered by Jews in the year 1255.[1] The tomb of St. Hugh is still pointed out to the curious visitor at Lincoln.

The number of such supposed martyrdoms is very large. Adrian Kembter, in a book published at Innsbruck in 1745, enumerates fifty-two, the last of which occurred in 1650. Even to-day a belief in such Jewish atrocities has survived in Eastern Europe. The New York *Sun* for April 4, 1904, published the following statement under date of Vienna, April 3: '*Die Zeit* publishes an extraordinary anti-Jewish proclamation issued by the Orthodox Association of Odessa, urging

[1] Three ballads on the murder of Hugh of Lincoln are found in Professor Child's *English and Scottish Ballads.*

right-minded Russians to follow the glorious example of their brethren who settled their accounts with the Jews at Kishineff last Easter. It declares that the victory is incomplete, for Satan has incarnated himself in the Jews. . . . The proclamation adds: "The Russians must aid the government to exterminate the Jews, who drink the blood of Russian children." '[1]

A legend so widely current as this could not fail to find expression in literature, especially when it lent itself so readily to human pathos and religious enthusiasm. The Chaucer Society's volume of *Originals and Analogues* contains three stories similar to that of the Prioress: the legend of Alphonsus of Lincoln, from a volume entitled *Fortalitium Fidei*, written in Latin prose, and dating from the second half of the fifteenth century; a French poem of 756 lines from a collection of Miracles of the Blessed Virgin Mary by Gautier de Coincy (1177–1236), telling the legend of an English boy murdered by a Jew for singing *Gaude Maria;* and an English poem of 152 lines of octosyllabic couplets from the *Miracles of Oure Lady*, which tells of a Paris beggar-boy killed by a Jew for singing *Alma Redemptoris Mater*.[2]

If we compare these three versions with the *Prioress's Tale*, we find that they exhibit several traits in common. In each instance the story is told to the greater glory of the Virgin Mary; it is the devotion of the boy-martyr to her, shown by the singing of a hymn in her honor, which leads to the murderous act of the Jew; it is by her agency that the miracle is wrought which betrays the murder. In each the child's

[1] My attention was called to this modern analogue by my friend and former pupil, Mr. S. B. Hemingway, of New Haven.

[2] *The Miracles of Oure Lady* have been published by Dr. Karl Horstmann, in Herrig's *Archiv für Neuere Sprachen*, 56, 223–236,

mother goes to seek him, and is advised of his whereabouts by the miraculously continued singing of the hymn. The first and third versions agree with Chaucer in specifying the *Alma Redemptoris Mater* as the hymn which excited the wrath of the Jew; the first and second agree in stating that the boy learned the hymn at school; the first and third agree that the murdered body was thrown into a 'wardrobe;' the second version differs from all the rest in that the murdered boy is restored to life. Of the three versions the first is, on the whole, nearest to Chaucer's; but its date precludes the idea that it was Chaucer's source. Chaucer must have used some version of the story which has not been preserved to us. For purposes of comparison, however, a synopsis of the tale may be interesting.

In the city of Lincoln dwelt a poor widow, who had a son ten years old named Alphonsus, whom she sent to school. After he had learned to read, he was set to study the rudiments of grammar and music. Hearing often that splendid antiphon, *Alma Redemptoris*, sung in church, he conceived such great devotion toward the Blessed Virgin, and so deeply impressed the antiphon upon his memory, that wherever he went, day or night, he used to sing it most sweetly with a loud voice. Now when he went to his mother's house, or back again to school, his way led through the Jewry. One of the Jews asked a Christian doctor what was the meaning of that song that sounded so sweet. On learning that it was a hymn sung to the praise and honor of the Blessed Virgin Mary, he began to plot with his fellows how they might slay the child who sang it. Waiting for a favorable opportunity, they seized on the boy as he was going through their quarter, singing the aforesaid antiphon with a loud voice. Having cut out his tongue, with which he praised the Blessed Virgin, and torn out

his heart, with which he pondered his song, they threw his body into their privy. But the Blessed Virgin, who is mother of mercy and pity, came to his aid, and placed a precious stone in his mouth to take the place of his tongue; and straightway he began to sing, as before, the aforesaid hymn, even better and louder than at first, nor did he cease day or night from his singing; and in this manner he continued for four days.

Now his mother, when she saw that he did not come home as usual, sought for him throughout the city; and finally, at the end of the four days, she went through the Jews' quarter, where her son had been slain, and, behold, the voice of her son, singing most sweetly that hymn of the Virgin which she had often heard from him, sounded in her ears. On hearing it, she shouted loudly; and her shouts gathered a crowd of people, who, with the judge of the city, broke into the house and took the body away; but never did he cease to sing that sweet song, even though he was dead. The body was placed on a couch and borne to the cathedral church of that town, where the bishop celebrated Mass, and bade the congregation pray earnestly that the secret might be revealed. When the sermon was finished, the little boy rose, and stood upon his couch, and took a precious stone from his mouth, and told all the people what had happened to him, and how the Virgin had come to him, and placed the stone in his mouth, that he should not cease, though dead, from her praise. Having finished, he gave the precious stone to the bishop, that it might be placed with the other relics on the altar, signed himself with the sign of the holy cross, and committed his spirit into the hands of the Saviour.

The version of the story which Chaucer used probably differed in some details from the foregoing. Chaucer's schoolboy lived in a great city of Asia, instead of

in merry Lincoln; but the more significant of the divergences may well be laid to Chaucer's artistic genius.

The art of the *Prioress's Tale* is shown chiefly in the increased emphasis laid on the human, as opposed to the supernatural aspects of the story. The main purpose of the other versions is to show the miraculous power of the Blessed Virgin and the black malignancy of the cursed Jews, the murdered boy himself being little more than a lay-figure, a necessary part of the machinery of the tale. Chaucer has slighted neither the glories of the Virgin nor the wickedness of the Jews; but he has subordinated both to the deep and tender pathos which centres in his 'litel clergeon, seven yeer of age,' his 'martir, souded to virginitee.' Eight full stanzas are devoted to the setting forth of his sweetly simple child-nature, before the tragic murder is even hinted at. We see the little clerk on his daily walk to and from his school, bending the knee, and saying his *Ave Mary*, wherever he saw an image of the Mother of Christ. His learning of the hymn which is to prove his destruction is shown in detail. As he sits in school conning his 'litel book,' he hears the *Alma Redemptoris* sung by older children in another room, — Chaucer's Version.

> And, as he dorste, he drough him ner and ner,
> And herkned ay the wordes and the note,
> Til he the firste vers coude al by rote.

Even the older schoolfellow who teaches him the rest of the song, and tells him what it means, is clearly, though briefly, characterized: —

> His felaw, which that elder was than he,
> Answerde him thus: 'this song, I have herd seye,
> Was maked of our blisful lady free,
> Hir to salue, and eek hir for to preye
> To been our help and socour when we deye.

I can no more expounde in this matere ;
I lerne song, I can but smal grammere.'

He is a likeable boy; but he lacks the divine spark of his younger comrade. To him the anthem is but part of his school task. Not so the 'litel clergeon:' —

'And is this song maked in reverence
Of Cristes moder?' seyde this innocent;
'Now certes, I wol do my diligence
To conne it al, er Cristemasse is went;
Though that I for my prymer shal be shent,
And shal be beten thryes in an houre,
I wol it conne, our lady for to honoure.'

If we wish to realize Chaucer's power in depicting these children, we have only to compare them with the utterly impossible children who occasionally appear in the plays of Shakespeare. If we wish to appreciate the difference between true pathos and mere sentiment in the portrayal of childhood, we may compare the *Prioress's Tale* with Tennyson's *In the Children's Hospital.*

After the murder is done, our attention is called for a while to the sorrowing mother, as she seeks her child, and to the tender love of the Virgin Mother who succors him in his death; but our ears ring through it all with the sweet, clear voice of the martyred boy as he sings: —

Alma Redemptoris Mater, quæ pervia cœli
Porta manes, et stella maris, succurre cadenti,
Surgere qui curat, populo: tu quæ genuisti,
Natura mirante, tuum sanctum Genitorem,
Virgo prius ac posterius, Gabrielis ab ore
Sumens illud Ave, peccatorum miserere.[1]

[1] This anthem is sung at Compline from the Saturday evening before the first Sunday in Advent until the feast of the Purification (*Breviarium Romanum*, Mechliniæ, 1866, *Pars Hiemalis*, p. 147). There is another Advent antiphon beginning with the same line (see Skeat's

SIR THOPAS AND THE TALE OF MELIBEUS

The Prioress's tale of the 'litel clergeon' has left the company, as well it might, in sober mood. It is the sort of story that one wants to ponder awhile in reverent silence. Even the rougher members of the party are deeply touched; and the Host himself, when, feeling his obligation to keep the journey a merry one, he begins to jest and jape again, pays subtle tribute to the potency of the spell by speaking in the seven-line stanza of the *Prioress's Tale*.

The Host begins to look about for the teller of the next tale. It must be a tale of mirth to restore the light-heartedness of the company; but not a 'mery' tale of the coarser sort — that would be too violent a shifting of tone. His glance lights on Chaucer, who is riding silently, his eyes upon the ground, 'in thoughtful or in pensive mood,' attentively listening to all that is said, but taking no part in the general conversation. He is just the man to tell 'som deyntee thing.' The poet is apparently traveling incognito;[1] the Host, at least, has no inkling as to the identity of the guest whom he is entertaining unawares. He begins by rallying him good-naturedly, though unceremoniously, on his retiring manners, and on the generous proportions of his figure: —

> 'He in the waast is shape as wel as I.'

There is something 'elvish' about his countenance, says the Host, as though he were a visitant from the land of faery, in the world, but not of it. Precisely the

Oxford Chaucer, 5. 177); but that the one given above is the one Chaucer had in mind is rendered probable by the direct translation from it given in the third of the three versions of the legend mentioned above.

[1] One wonders whether the Man of Law in his reference to Chaucer was equally ignorant of the poet's presence.

word, we agree, to describe the peculiar elusiveness of Chaucer's playful-serious nature.

If the Host is ignorant of Chaucer's identity, we are not; and when Geoffrey agrees to tell a story, we prepare ourselves for a tale which shall be the masterpiece of the whole collection. But that is not Chaucer's way. It is much more modest, and vastly more humorous, that he should represent himself as telling a tale which should outwear the patience of his hearers before it was half told. Dramatically, too, his choice is entirely probable. Suppose a great master of the violin traveling incognito should be jocosely invited to 'favor the company with a tune;' what more likely, granting him a keen sense of humor, than that he should tune his fiddle and strike up Yankee Doodle or an Irish jig? His musical reputation is secure. And so with Chaucer; does not the reader know that all the tales are his? A keen observer would doubtless detect a master's touch even in the rendition of Yankee Doodle, and the veriest tyro in literature must recognize that the burlesque of *Sir Thopas* is executed with matchless poetical skill.

The Rime of Sir Thopas.

To appreciate fully the delicacy and point of this literary satire, one should know some of the weary romances which so vastly delighted our forefathers of long ago.[1] From morn to noon, from noon to dewy eve, one may read of Sir Degrevant and Sir Eglamour and Sir Guy of Warwick, of Lybeaus Disconus and of the mythical Alexander. These romances often have the charm of naïve simplicity, but they are terribly long-winded, full

[1] A readily accessible example of the species, though written long after Chaucer's death, is the *Squyr of Lowe Degre*, recently edited for the Athenæum Press Series by Professor W. E. Mead. It is by no means wholly devoid of interest, and is, as its editor remarks, 'mercifully brief.' The language will offer no difficulty to a reader of Chaucer.

of digression and minute description, and, of course, highly improbable.

With such works before him, Chaucer might very easily have given us a howling farce, after the manner of Shakespeare's 'Pyramus and Thisbe' or Butler's *Hudibras;* but this would not have been quite courteous to those of his contemporaries who were still writing such romances, and to the still larger number who still were glad to read them. Neither would it have been so effective; one may easily o'erleap himself in the matter of satire, and make his caricature so gross that it ceases to convince. Chaucer has performed the more delicate and much more difficult task of writing an imitation, so true to the original that one might easily read it through in a collection of romances without suspecting its good faith, while so subtly heightening the original traits of diffuseness and essential nonsense, that its absurdity becomes immediately patent to one who will look a second time. All the real charm of naïve simplicity Chaucer has reproduced intact. We are really disappointed when the tale is rudely stopped in the middle of a line. Nearly a hundred lines pass musically by before anything happens at all. At last the much belauded hero finds himself face to face with a 'greet geaunt,' and we look to see lively action. But no; Sir Thopas politely promises to meet the giant to-morrow, and makes his escape.

> And al it was thurgh goddes gras
> And thurgh his fair beringe.

We must hear to the minutest detail how he was armed, and how he appeared as he rode forth; and the tale is interrupted in its two hundred and seventh line, before there is any remote prospect of battle. The broad drift of the absurdity is obvious enough; it is in little touches of the deepest bathos, and in the continually recurring

tone of *petit-bourgeoisie*, that the subtler humor resides. We are to be impressed with the hero's surpassing comeliness of feature. His face is white as a lily? No, as *payndemayn*, the choicest quality of wheat bread. 'His rode is lyk scarlet in grayn,' i. e. it will not come out in the wash. And to cap the stanza: —

> And I yow telle in good certayn,
> *He hadde a semely nose.*

The forest through which Childe Thopas rides is infested with many wild beasts. We look to hear of the lion and the pard; but the next verse explains: —

> Ye, bothe bukke and hare!

Or, again, we are to be told how the hero's very person inspires fear: —

> For in that contree was ther noon
> That to him dorste ryde or goon,
> *Neither wyf ne childe.*

As examples of the *bourgeois* tone, as Professor Koelbing calls it,[1] one may notice that in the catalogue of 'herbes grete and smale' which spring in the forest is mentioned

> Notemuge to putte in ale,
> Whether it be moyste or stale,
> Or for to leye in cofre.

So, too, when Sir Thopas wished to swear a mighty oath,

> He swoor on ale and breed,
> How that 'the geaunt shal be deed,
> Bityde what bityde!'

But to the Host, that sturdy dispenser of ale and wine, the crowning absurdity, beyond which he cannot suffer the tale to proceed a stanza, is the statement: —

> Himself drank water of the wel,
> As did the knight Sir Percivel.

Let him disdain the use of a roof, if he please, and

[1] 'Zu Chaucer's Sir Thopas,' *Englische Studien*, 11. 495–511.

'liggen in his hode;' but of deliberate choice to drink 'water of the wel' —

> 'No more of this, for goddes dignitee,'
> Quod oure hoste, 'for thou makest me
> So wery of thy verray lewednesse
> That, also wisly god my soule blesse,
> Myn eres aken of thy drasty speche.'

Under this rude interruption Chaucer shows an angelic sweetness of temper. It is the best rime he knows; but if it is not acceptable to the company, he will tell a little thing in prose. From the standpoint of the modern reader, at least, Chaucer more than revenges himself by inflicting his long 'moral tale vertuous' of Melibeus.

The *Tale of Melibeus* is a translation of a French work called *Le livre de Melibee et de dame Prudence*, which is in its turn based on the *Liber Consolationis et Consilii* of Albertano of Brescia, who died soon after the middle of the thirteenth century. Dame Prudence gives some excellent advice to her impulsive husband, Melibeus, and, to adopt the words of Tyrwhitt, the tale 'was probably much esteemed in its time; but in this age of levity, I doubt some readers will be apt to regret that he did not rather give us the remainder of Sire Thopas.' Here is a good opportunity to take Chaucer at his word, when he says of another tale: — The Tale of Melibeus.

> And therfore, whoso list it nat yhere,
> Turne over the leef, and chese another tale.

THE MONK'S TALE

The modern reader has doubtless been bored by the moralizing tale of Melibeus, if indeed he has not skipped it outright. Not so the honest Host. He has your true middle-class Englishman's love for moraliz-

ing, if not for morality. Moreover, the tale has for him a special and personal interest: —

> Our hoste seyde, 'as I am faithful man,
> And by the precious *corpus Madrian*,
> I hadde lever than a barel ale
> That goode lief my wyf hadde herd this tale!'

She is no Dame Prudence to restrain her husband's wrath. On the contrary, she is a sort of *bourgeois* Lady Macbeth, urging on her husband to acts of violence; while in her ability to vilify the poor man, and force him to do her will, she is own sister to the Wife of Bath. She will make him slay one of the neighbors, and bring him to a murderer's death, one of these days, the Host predicts: —

> 'For I am perilous with knyf in honde,
> Al be it that I dar nat hir withstonde.'

After this bit of realism, which serves well as a buffer between the rather ponderous 'tales' which precede and follow, the Host turns to my lord the Monk, and begins to rally him on his general air of well-fed prosperity and physical fitness. From such a sleek, comfortable-looking gentleman, the Host confidently expects a 'mery' tale. But alas! for mine Host's disappointed hopes! The Monk is not, like the reckless Pardoner, a man who can suffer his dignity to lie fallow for a season. However far he may stray from the 'reule of Seint Maure or of Seint Beneit,' the dignity of his person and his rank allow no unseemliness or levity of speech. In his own cell, surrounded by his fellow monks, with a plump swan and a good bottle before him, his fat sides may have shaken often enough with laughter at a merry jest; but no such relaxation is convenient in the promiscuous company of the Canterbury Road. With unruffled patience he hears the Host through to the end, suffering his free familiarity

and scarcely veiled innuendo to pass unanswered and unnoticed.

> 'I wol doon al my diligence,
> As fer as souneth into honestee,
> To telle yow a tale, or two, or three.'

The tales he offers are a life of Edward the Confessor, or a series of 'tragedies,' of which he has a hundred at home in his cell. Condescendingly he explains to the unlearned that —

> Tragedie is to seyn a certeyn storie,
> As olde bokes maken us memorie,
> Of him that stood in greet prosperitee
> And is yfallen out of heigh degree
> Into miserie, and endeth wrecchedly.

With true scholarly spirit he apologizes for the lack of chronological order in what is to follow; with a self-depreciation worthy of Matthew Arnold he begs to be excused for his ignorance; and then, without waiting to see whether the choice is going to be acceptable, launches into his weary string of 'tragedies.'

One day, as the sprightly author of the *Decameron* was sitting in his study, he was visited by a strange monk, who told him of a death-bed vision, in which a fellow monk had seen heaven and hell opened before him, and had clearly distinguished Giovanni Boccaccio among those dwelling in the less desirable of these mansions. The impressionable, imaginative nature of Boccaccio was so deeply moved by this gruesome prophecy that he was at first determined to burn his books, and devote himself to a life of religion; but under the saner counsels of his friend Petrarch, he decided instead to abandon his more frivolous compositions, and give himself to the study of classical philology. Among the works which followed on this so-called conversion is one entitled *De Casibus Virorum*

Sources.

et Feminarum Illustrium, a sort of biographical dictionary, dealing with the lives of those who had stood in great prosperity and had fallen from their high degree into misery, and had come to a wretched end. Not a very pleasant subject for a book, we are tempted to say; but the subject was one which appealed to an age intensely interested in biography, and eagerly craving the excitement of tragic downfalls. During the period when Chaucer was strongly under the influence of Boccaccio and other Italian models, — the exact year we cannot determine, — he seems to have planned a similar work in his own English, which was to have consisted of a hundred 'tragedies,' beginning with Lucifer and Adam and extending down to his own day — such a work as his disciple Lydgate accomplished in his *Fall of Princes*, a generation later. Fortunately, we think, this work was one of the many which Chaucer planned and started, but never brought to completion. He either tired of it, or perhaps came soon to recognize that the work was not worth doing. That he was conscious of its literary badness at the time he wrote the *Canterbury Tales* is shown by the criticisms showered upon it by such diverse characters as the Knight and the Host. He had, however, written some dozen or thirteen of the hundred tragedies, taking up his subjects not chronologically, but according to his whim and fancy; and when he came to construct the *Canterbury Tales*, he saw a chance to utilize these discarded fragments, dramatically so appropriate to the ponderous dignity of the Monk, while at the same time indicating his maturer critical judgment as to their literary worth. He added four new paragraphs dealing with contemporary worthies,[1] purposely upset the chronological

[1] See Skeat's argument to prove that the tragedies of Pedro of Spain, Pedro of Cyprus, Barnabo, and Ugolino are of later date, in the *Oxford*

order to conceal the incompleteness of the series and to give greater naturalness to the Monk's narration, and foisted the whole off upon the substantial shoulders of the defenseless Monk. Here is a thrifty way of disposing of one's literary bastards! In composing the several sections, Chaucer had recourse not only to his great model, Boccaccio, but to the Vulgate Bible, to Ovid, Boethius, Guido, and others, the tale of Ugolino being taken bodily from the thirty-third canto of Dante's *Inferno*.

The Seventeen Tragedies.

A discussion of the literary merit of these 'tragedies' must resemble the famous chapter on the snakes of Ireland. With few exceptions, they have no literary merit. Apart from the unspeakable monotony of the series, the dry epitomizing character of the individual narrations and the inevitably recurring moral make them intolerable. The one shining exception to this sweeping condemnation is the tale of Ugolino, a splendid bit of condensed narrative, rich in pathos and true tragic power; but the excellence of this piece is due to the success with which the author has reproduced the matchless art of Dante.

Before leaving the tale, one may pause a minute to notice the eight-line stanza in which it is written, a measure which Chaucer had used in his very early *A. B. C.* This stanza, when supplemented by an additional alexandrine, gives us the Spenserian stanza of the *Faerie Queene*.

THE NUN'S PRIEST'S TALE

Not only the Knight who interrupts courteously and the Host who seconds his objection more roughly,

Chaucer, vol. iii. pp. 428–429. The account of Barnabo deals with events which happened in 1385, which is the latest historical allusion contained in the *Canterbury Tales*.

but the whole company must have been bored to death by the weary string of dismal 'tragedies' which the Monk has thought fit to narrate on this sunny eighteenth of April. The Knight objects that most people care for but 'litel hevinesse;' it is pleasanter to hear of men who from poor estate have attained to great and lasting prosperity. The Host assures the reverend gentleman that such talk as his is not worth a butterfly:—

> 'For sikerly, nere clinking of your belles,
> That on your brydel hange on every syde,
> By heven king, that for us alle dyde,
> I sholde er this han fallen doun for slepe,
> Although the slough had never been so depe.'

We poor readers, who can hear this merry clinking of the bridle bells but faintly with the inner ear of imagination, are surely to be forgiven if we 'fallen doun for slepe' before the 'tragedies' are half recounted. However, we have, by way of compensation, a relief which was not possible to the pilgrims — the blessed relief of skipping; boldly turn three pages at once, and we reach one of the merriest tales that ever graced our English tongue.

Neither in the General Prologue nor in the links which fit the tale into its framework has Chaucer taken any pains to characterize the 'gentil Preest' who tells this tale. So we may dismiss him without ceremony, and imagine ourselves face to face with Chaucer; his is the all-pervading geniality and sly elvish humor of this sparkling tale, which seems part and parcel of the April sunshine. There is no piece of all Chaucer's writings that one would sooner choose to set before the uninitiated and say, 'Here is the Chaucer whom we love.' Dull must he be of soul who fails to become a convert. Here is the vivid delineation of scene, the

subtle characterization, the infinite ease and grace of language and verse, the delicate play of humor, above all the fresh-hearted gayety and eminent sanity to which we gladly turn when wearied out with the more modern poets and story-tellers who insistently brood over the mystery of this unintelligible world, as the pilgrims turned from the weary 'tragedies' of the Monk.

Let no one suppose that our present-day fad for animal stories, wherein only too often an entirely respectable dumb beast is endowed with a degree of wishy-washy sentimentalism which even a moderately intelligent human being would be ashamed of, is at all a modern discovery. Far in the 'dark backward and abysm of time,' long centuries before the authors of the *Jungle Books* or the Brer Fox stories were dreamed of, our remote ancestors delighted in stories of beasts and birds who spoke and acted more or less like men and women, though keeping in the main the frolic wantonness and shrewd cunning of the beast. In those old days, I suppose, people were interested in animals as the daily companions of the field, and even of the hearth; to-day, in the crowded life of our cities, we are interested in beasts because we see so little of them. An honest, well-meaning clergyman spends a summer vacation in the country, and armed with opera-glass, note-book, and abundant sentiment, 'discovers' in the life of the forest a far-seeing wisdom, a pathos, a tragedy, with which he fills his books — or lecture-halls — for a year to come. From this so-called 'nature study' the step to the sentimental animal story is inevitable. I do not mean that all our animal stories are so written; I could name at least three writers of such tales who escape, or nearly escape, the charge of false sentimentality; it is the great army of their imitators — but enough of this.

Sources.

Any one who will venture into the labyrinthine discussions of the folklorists will find abundant proof that stories not unlike the central episode of the cock and fox in Chaucer's tale have been told since the earliest times in all countries of the world, from darkest Africa to farthest Inde. Tales of the fireside soon find their way into literature, when literature has once appeared, and so it was with these popular stories of the beast and bird. There have been in the past two main forms of the animal story: the Æsopian fable, written by a moralizer who sought to give new effectiveness to a familiar bit of practical wisdom; and the animal epic, the great representative of which is *Reynard the Fox*, written, in its later form at least, by a satirist who wished to make fun of men and women under the convenient guise of animals, at whom any one may laugh without fear of the censor. Of these two literary forms, that of the fable is the simpler and apparently the earlier. I need not characterize it; every one knows his Æsop; but it is interesting to see how the germ of Chaucer's tale appears in fable setting. Here is a translation of a Latin fable from the early Middle Ages, one of a collection which goes under the name of Romulus:[1] —

A Cock was walking up and down on the dunghill, when a Fox, seeing him, came near, and sitting down before him, broke in with these words: 'I never saw a fowl equal to you in good looks, nor one who deserved more praise for the sweetness of his voice, save only your father. He, when he wanted to sing louder than usual, used to shut his eyes.' The Cock, who was a great lover of praise, did as the Fox suggested; he

[1] A verse translation of Marie de France's later but more artistic version of this fable is given by Professor Skeat in the *Oxford Chaucer*, vol. iii, p. 432.

shut his eyes, and began to sing with a loud voice. Immediately the Fox made a rush at him, and turned his song into sadness by hurrying off to the woods with the singer. There happened to be shepherds in the field, and they began to chase the Fox with dogs and with great outcry. Then the Cock said to the Fox: 'Tell them that I belong to you, and that this robbery is none of their business.' But when the Fox began to speak, the Cock dropped from his mouth, and by the aid of his wings soon found refuge in the top of a tree. Then the Fox said, 'Woe to him who speaks when he had better be silent.' And the Cock answered him from the tree, 'Woe to him who closes his eyes when he had better keep them open.' [1]

French and German scholars have not yet finished fighting out the question to which nationality belongs the honor of originating the great animal epic of the Middle Ages, in which King Noble the lion, Bruin the bear, Grimbald the wolf, and the other animals hold their parliaments, and issue their decrees for the suppression of Reynard the fox, hero of this 'vulpiad,' who manages by his cleverness to outwit them all. The epic of Reynard, as we have it in French and German, and in the other tongues into which it was translated,[2] is not the work of any single author or single age. Like the great cathedral buildings of England, the original fabric was freely added to and elaborated, any animal fable tending to get itself incorporated into this most popular of poems. The story of the cock and the fox is found both in the French *Roman de Renart* and in the German *Reinecke Fuchs;* but neither can have been Chaucer's immediate source. Miss Kate Petersen,

[1] I have followed the Latin text given by Miss Petersen: *On the Sources of the Nonne Prestes Tale*, Boston, 1898, pp. 3-6.

[2] The first English translation was made by Caxton in 1481.

who has examined the matter most carefully, concludes that Chaucer follows a version of the epic now lost to us, which was nearer to the German *Reinecke* than to the French *Renart*. By comparing Chaucer's version with these two, and making allowances for what may have been Chaucer's independent changes and additions, she ingeniously reconstructs what must have been the main details of the version Chaucer used. This reconstructed version I shall reproduce here as a basis for comparison with the *Nun's Priest's Tale*.[1]

Beside a grove dwells a woman somewhat advanced in years, content with her property and with her provision of grain and bacon. Within her yard, protected by fence and hedge, she keeps a cock named Chantecler and a number of hens, the best of which is named Pinte. One day at sunrise the fox, full of tricks, comes after Chantecler, but finds the fence too strong for him. At last, however, he pulls out a slat with his teeth, and crawls through the hedge into a heap of cabbages, where he lies hidden. Pinte perceives his presence, and calling out to Chantecler, who is asleep, she and her companions fly up on a beam. Chantecler comes up proudly, assures the hens that they are quite safe in this yard, and bids them return to their former place. He then tells Pinte that he has had a bad dream in which he saw a reddish beast; is it any wonder that he is distressed and full of apprehension? May heaven interpret the dream aright! Here, perhaps, Pinte offers some interpretation of the dream. Chantecler makes a reply in which he scoffs at dreams and makes humorous

[1] *On the Sources of the Nonne Prestes Tale*, Radcliffe College Monographs, No. 10, Boston, 1898. (In reproducing her hypothetical version of the tale, I take some liberties with her language.) This study supersedes the discussion of sources given in *Originals and Analogues*, pp. 111–128, though the French texts there given are useful for consultation.

remarks about women. Summoning up his courage, he defies the dream.

A little before noon, Chantecler, unaware of the fox, flies nearer to the place where he is lurking, and on first seeing him, starts to flee. But the fox begs Chantecler not to flee from a friend. Have not their families always been on friendly terms? He praises the singing of Chantecler's father, who used to sing with closed eyes. Why should not Chantecler try to imitate him? Chantecler, too rash to perceive his folly, begins to beat his wings, and to sing with closed eyes. Upon this the fox seizes him by the throat and runs for the wood, while Pinte and the other hens lament their loss. The woman comes at the cry of the hens, and seeing the fox with Chantecler in his mouth cries, 'Harrow!' Every one pursues the fox. The dog is let loose. But Chantecler, in all his peril, prompts the fox to utter words of defiance to his pursuers. The fox opens his mouth, whereupon the cock escapes and flies into a tree. The cock assures the fox that the adventure shall not be repeated. The fox invokes shame upon the mouth that speaks out of season; and Chantecler says, 'Misfortune come upon him who shuts his eyes at the wrong time.'

Though the point of this tale is the same as that of the Latin fable, we find the characters supplied with definite habitation and with names, while the story is elaborated by the introduction of a new episode, that of the premonitory dream, and by some attempt at characterization. Chaucer, in utilizing this story, has made some changes in detail — the appearance of the fox is deferred until later in the story, when his part in the action is to be important, distinctly improving the structure of the narrative; he has greatly elaborated the discussion of the dream, giving the skeptical atti-

tude to Pertelote rather than Chanticleer; and he has immensely heightened the description and characterization. In this way, what was originally a fireside story has become first a literary fable, then a developed narrative, and lastly a work of art.

Chaucer's first care in retelling the old story was to give heightened color and realism to his background. He goes out into the country and paints a peasant's cottage, such as must have been matter of common experience to the readers of his own day — the simple house of two rooms, with its sooty 'hall' serving as kitchen, living-room, hen-house, barn, and pig-sty, and the smaller 'bower' where slept the widow and her daughters. We are given a view of the every-day peasant life, its hard work and meagre fare, its narrowing interests; all this serving as a sharp contrast to the lordly elegance and wide intellectual scope of Chanticleer. Still, it is not an unhappy life that Chaucer shows; if the widow's board is but plainly furnished forth, she has as recompense a good digestion: —

Chaucer's Version.

> The goute lette hir nothing for to daunce,
> N' apoplexye shente nat hir heed.

Best of all, she has that 'hertes suffisaunce' which makes any life worth the living. Once again, later in the tale, the peasant life reasserts itself, when the widow, her daughters, the neighbors, and all the animals of the farm in wild bedlam join in the hue and cry after the marauding fox. Both these pictures have all the vividness and realism of a Dutch *genre* painting by Teniers or Gerard Dou.

A greater achievement than this is the creation of Chanticleer, a character which is real and interesting, while remaining still a rooster, at the same time human and galline. To accomplish this, Chaucer has seized

on the trait of character which is in a rooster most human and in a man most galline, the quality which the two species share in common — egotism, personal vanity, in a word, the strut. This is the quality which mankind agrees in attributing to the rooster as a type; doubtless a rooster poet would attribute the same quality to man. This is the trait of character which in the old fable leads to Chanticleer's downfall, when the fox cozens him with his pretty obvious flattery; this is preeminently the quality of the domestic tyrant. So that it is without any sense of incongruity that we see the two types coalesce.

Chanticleer, as he is first described to us, is only a superlative rooster, superlative in his crowing, superlative in his galline beauty: —

> In al the land of crowing nas his peer.
> His vois was merier than the mery orgon
> On messe-dayes that in the chirche gon;
> Wel sikerer was his crowing in his logge,
> Than is a clokke, or an abbey orlogge.
> By nature knew he ech ascencioun
> Of equinoxial in thilke toun;
> For whan degrees fiftene were ascended,
> Thanne crew he, that it mighte nat ben amended.

From this it is an easy step to the singing of a song with words: —

> But such a joye was it to here hem singe,
> Whan that the brighte sonne gan to springe,
> In swete accord, 'my lief is faren in londe.'

This is followed up by an offhand statement: —

> For thilke tyme, as I have understonde,
> Bestes and briddes coude speke and singe.

We accept this statement readily enough, as a necessary condition of animal stories. But if animals can talk, they can also have dreams. So bit by bit we are led into the plausible impossibility of the conjugal

dispute, with all its display of erudition and dialectics.

Dame Partlet becomes the typical housewife, kindly solicitous of her husband's welfare, even though she reproach him for his faint heart, —

> 'Have ye no mannes herte, and han a berd?'

unwilling of course to accept his explanation of the dream, confident in the superiority of her own wisdom and in the efficacy of her own homely remedies. Was there ever a wife who did not love to prescribe from her medicine chest, or ever a husband who did not protest that medicine was quite unnecessary? She is even ready to humor her husband's weakness for pedantry, quotes to him from one of his own authors, enters at length into a scientific explanation of dreams. She has not lived with the learned Chanticleer for nothing. As for the cock, he is your typical pedant and egotist. He is proud of his voice, of his learning, and of his immense superiority to his wives, whose company he enjoys because of his superiority. With what evident self-satisfaction he quotes an uncomplimentary Latin proverb, which he translates wrongly, deliciously conscious that his playful fraud cannot be detected: —

> 'For also siker as *In principio,*
> *Mulier est hominis confusio;*[1]
> Madame, the sentence of this Latin is —
> Womman is mannes joye and al his blis.'

His wife ventures to quote the authority of Cato that dreams are not to be regarded. Very well, if she wants authorities, she shall have them; and he proceeds to bury her volumes deep under his accumulated lore. She ought to know that a woman can't argue. But if

[1] The phrase 'In principio' begins the book of Genesis and the Gospel of St. John, in the Vulgate. 'It is as true as the Bible that woman is man's confusion.'

Chanticleer is pedant and egotist, he is nevertheless a kindly soul, and we cannot but like him.

However learnedly Chanticleer may discourse, however human he may seem in his petty domestic tyrannies, Chaucer never suffers us quite to forget that he is but a rooster and that Dame Partlet is but a hen. Were we to forget, the delicious humor of the situation would be lost. This end Chaucer attains by constantly recurring to distinctly galline traits. After displaying her complete acquaintance with the *materia medica*, and assuring her husband that the herbs necessary

> 'To purgen yow binethe, and eek above'

are growing right there in the yard, she bids him

> '*Pekke* hem up right as they growe, and ete hem in.'

So, too, when the long debate is ended, the rooster nature reasserts itself: —

> And with that word he fley doun fro the beem,
> For it was day, and eek his hennes alle;
> And with a chuk he gan hem for to calle,
> For he had founde a corn, lay in the yerd.
> Royal he was, he was namore aferd.
> . . . . . .
> He loketh as it were a grim leoun;
> And on his toos he romeths up and doun,
> Him deyned not to sette his foot to grounde.

The beautiful bubble of pride and lordliness is pricked to nothing by the clever stratagem of Daun Russel the fox, and his ignominious rape of Chanticleer. That the airy fabric of the tale may not fall too suddenly to ground, Chaucer has recourse to the mock heroic. The marauding fox is apostrophized as

> O newe Scariot, newe Genilon!
> False dissimilour, O Greek Sinon,
> That broghtest Troye al outrely to sorwe!

There is learned discussion of free-will and God's foreknowledge, as one might debate the reason of a prince's fall. The outcry of the widowed hens is compared to the lamentations of the Trojan ladies when Ilion was won, to the shrieks of 'Hasdrubales wyf,' to the wailing of the senators' wives when Nero burned imperial Rome. It takes all the wild hubbub of shouting rustics, barking dogs, and quacking geese to bring us back again to the realization that all this mighty action has been transacted in a poor widow's barnyard, and that its protagonists are but a cock and a fox.

The rest of the story, which now follows the lines of the old fable, is disposed of quickly; the moral is pointed, and thus is ended Chaucer's tale of Chanticleer.

CHAPTER XI

THE CANTERBURY TALES, GROUPS C AND D

THE PHYSICIAN'S TALE

The *Physician's Tale* begins a new group of tales, and Chaucer has provided it with no prologue by way of introduction. The portrait of this doctor of physic given in the General Prologue is allowed to stand as our sole information about the character which, judged from a modern standpoint, has in it more of the quack than of the reputable practitioner. Neither is the tale which Chaucer assigns to the man of medicine particularly appropriate to him. One cannot refrain a smile at Ten Brink's ingenious suggestion that its 'desperate, bloody ending' is 'appropriate to the character of the Doctor and his professional acquaintance with violent remedies.' One may notice, too, that Virginia's allusion to the daughter of Jephthah gives the lie to the statement of the General Prologue that

> His studie was but litel on the bible.

Chaucer had apparently written the story with another purpose in view, perhaps with the intention of incorporating it into the *Legend of Good Women*, and finding it in his desk drawer, determined, with his accustomed literary thrift, to turn it to account in the *Canterbury Tales*. If not particularly appropriate, it is not markedly inappropriate. Possibly the digression on the proper bringing up of daughters may have been inserted as suitable to the Doctor in his capacity of family adviser.

Sources.

One who was not familiar with Chaucer's literary methods would immediately assume from the explicit statement of the first line that the source of the tale was Titus Livius. Livy's history is, of course, the ultimate source; but the most hasty reading of the Latin story will show a wide divergence. In Livy, Virginius, on hearing the unjust sentence, immediately snatches up a knife, and without any pause buries it in his daughter's breast. This is more natural and less revolting than the deliberate deed of Chaucer's Virginius. The rather barbarous episode of the head sent to Appius on a charger is also absent from Livy's narrative. Chaucer did not make these changes himself; for in dealing with themes from antique history he is usually chary of alteration. The tale explicitly says: —

> This is no fable,
> But knowen for historial thing notable,
> The sentence of it sooth is, out of doute.

Moreover, though the change makes possible the affecting dialogue between Virginia and her father, which is the emotional climax of the tale, it involves, as we have seen, a certain untruth to nature as compared with Livy's treatment. The truth is that Chaucer did not go to Livy at all. Indeed, we have no proof that Livy was any more than a name to him. The outline of the story, and the ascription of it to Livy, are taken directly from that great storehouse of story, the *Roman de la Rose*. Jean de Meun's narrative is not long, and since a comparison of it with Chaucer's tale serves well to show the latter's literary methods, I shall translate the passage entire.[1]

[1] The story occupies lines 5613–5682 of Méon's edition of the *Roman de la Rose*. Skeat has reprinted the passage in the *Oxford Chaucer*, vol. 3. pp. 435–437. I have made my translation from his text.

Did not Appius well deserve to hang, who made his servant undertake, by means of false witnesses, a false quarrel against the maiden Virginia, who was daughter to Virginius, as saith Titus Livius, who knows well how to relate the case? This he did because he could not have mastery over the maiden, who cared not for him, nor for his lust. The false churl said in audience: 'Sir judge, give sentence for me, for the maid is mine; I will prove her for my slave against all men living: for soon after she was born, she was taken from my house and given in keeping to Virginius, where she has been brought up. Therefore I demand of you, Sir Appius, that you deliver me my slave, for it is right that she serve me, and not him who has brought her up; and if Virginius denies this, I am all ready to prove it, for I can find good witnesses of the fact.' Thus spake the false traitor, who was a retainer of the false judge; and when the plea had gone thus far, before Virginius, who was all ready to reply and confound his adversaries, had spoken, Appius gave hasty judgment that without delay the maiden should be returned to the churl. And when the good gentleman before named, good knight and well-renowned, that is to say, Virginius, heard this thing, and saw well that he could not defend his daughter against Appius, but that he would be forced to give her up and deliver her body over to shame, he chose injury rather than shame, by a wonderful determination, if Titus Livius lies not. For in love, and without malice, he straightway cut off the head of his beautiful daughter Virginia and presented it to the judge before all men in full consistory; and the judge, as the story says, straightway gave order that he be taken and led away to be slain or hanged. But he neither slew him nor hanged him, for the people defended him, being moved to great pity as soon as the

deed was known; then, for this evil deed, Appius was put in prison, and there quickly slew himself before the day of his trial; and Claudius, who had challenged the maiden, was sentenced to death as a malefactor; but Virginius, taking pity on him, won a reprieve for him, making suit to the people that he should be sent into exile, and all were condemned and put to death who were witnesses in the case.

Chaucer's Version.

What Chaucer has done is to reproduce this narrative with substantial fidelity, heightening its effectiveness somewhat by a freer use of direct discourse, while adding of his own fantasy two long original passages, which serve to change entirely the artistic emphasis of the tale. These passages are the charming description of Virginia's maidenly loveliness, with the digression on the bringing up of daughters, and the infinitely pathetic scene in which Virginia learns her father's purpose, and herself chooses death rather than shame. Beside the wonderful effectiveness of these two passages, the narrative portions sink into insignificance, or rather serve as a mere framework for the picture of Virginia's spotless purity. In the French it is the unjust judge and his righteous punishment that receive chief emphasis; with Chaucer, the personality of Virginia dominates the whole. The narrative is not slighted; it is merely subordinated; and the memory of the reader lingers fondly on the maid who

> Floured in virginitee
> With alle humilitee and abstinence.

THE PARDONER'S TALE

The Host has been so wrought upon by the pathos of the Physician's tale of Virginia, that he feels it absolutely essential to his physical well-being that he hear a

'mery tale.' With a delicate touch of satire, the author makes him turn to the Pardoner as one most likely to satisfy this need. The Pardoner is ready enough with his assent; but the company has reached a wayside tavern, whose 'ale-stake,' crowned with its garland, projects far over the muddy road, and the physical well-being of the Pardoner demands that he stop long enough to drink a draught of corny ale and eat a cake. The 'gentles' of the company, however, know only too well what to expect when a pardoner undertakes to tell a 'mery tale.' 'Let him tell us no ribaldry,' they cry.

> 'Tel us som moral thing, that we may lere
> Som wit, and thanne wol we gladly here.'

Ready complaisance is part of the Pardoner's stock in trade.

> 'I graunte, ywis,' quod he, 'but I mot thinke
> Upon som honest thing, whyl that I drinke.'

Things honest and of good report proceed from a pardoner's lips only as the result of meditation.

The Pardoner is, of course, a dreadful hypocrite; but his hypocrisy is a part of his profession merely, and he is now on a vacation. He is an honest hypocrite, at least in so far as he does not deceive himself, nor try to pass himself for a holy man 'among friends.' As he sits and quaffs his corny ale and surveys his fellow voyagers, his tongue is loosened, and in a spirit partly of bravado, but more, I think, with an artist's natural pride in his art, he begins to give away some of the secrets of his trade. 'Here, in this company, you see, I am a very unassuming, good-natured fellow; but when I preach in church, I take pains to assume a haughty manner of speech, and put in a word of Latin here and there "to saffron with my predicacioun." I show my relics — they are really only rags and bones — I

preach always on the sin of avarice, so that my hearers may give the larger offering. In this way I win a hundred marks [1] a year.'

The Pardoner's reason for giving this frank account of his own hypocrisies I take to have been something like this. 'I am not really a moral man,' he implies, 'and I do not intend to take the trouble of keeping up appearances on this journey; but it is my business to give moral discourses, and since you insist on having a moral tale, I will give you an example of my pulpit oratory.'

> 'For, though myself be a ful vicious man,
> A moral tale yet I yow telle can,
> Which I am wont to preche, for to winne.
> Now holde your pees, my tale I wol beginne.'

The sermon which follows on this preamble consists of a highly dramatic story, which is interrupted after a few lines by a long discussion on the sins of swearing, gluttony, dicing, and other of the deadly sins, and only continued after an interval of some hundred and sixty lines. This discussion contains several touches of humor; but our main attention must be occupied with the story itself.

Sources.

The immediate source of the *Pardoner's Tale*, which may have been some *fabliau* now lost, is not known to us; but the story in its main features is one of great antiquity and wide dissemination. The earliest form of the tale which has been discovered is in an old Hindoo collection of tales, and bears the title *Vedabbha Játaka*. Other versions are found in Persian, Arabic, Kashmiri, and Tibetan. From the Orient the tale was brought to Europe, where versions are found in Italian, German, French, Portuguese, and Latin.[2]

[1] Equivalent to at least seven hundred pounds of modern money.

[2] See *Originals and Analogues of Some of Chaucer's Canterbury Tales*, pp. 129–134, 415–436.

The latest appearance of the story is found in the tale of *The King's Ankus*, in Kipling's *Second Jungle Book*. The version which bears closest resemblance to Chaucer's is found in the 1572 edition of the *Cento Novelle Antiche*, a collection of tales which probably antedates Boccaccio. This tale is in itself so well told, and furnishes so interesting a comparison with Chaucer, that I shall translate it entire.

Here is the story of a hermit, who as he was walking through a forest, found very great treasure.

Walking one day through a forest, a Hermit found a large cave which was well concealed, and betaking himself thither — for he was very weary — as he reached the cave, he beheld in a certain place a great gleaming; for there was much gold there. Now as soon as he saw what it was, incontinently he went away, and began to run through the desert as fast as he could go. As he was running thus, the Hermit came upon three great robbers, who had taken their stand in this forest to rob whosoever should pass there. But never as yet had they learned that this gold was there. Now as they stood concealed, and saw this man fleeing so, who had no one behind to pursue him, they were at first somewhat afeard; but, notwithstanding, they accosted him to know why he fled, for of this they marveled greatly. He answered and said: 'My brothers, I flee death, who comes after me, pursuing me.' They, seeing neither man nor beast that pursued him, said: 'Show us who pursues thee, and lead us where this death is.' Then the Hermit said to them, 'Come with me, and I will show you him;' but he begged them in every way that they should not seek death, forasmuch as he for his part was fleeing him. And they, wishing to find death, to see after what fashion he was made, asked him nothing else. The Hermit seeing that he could not do

otherwise, and being in fear, conducted them to the cave whence he had departed, and said to them, 'Here is death which pursued me,' and showed them the gold that was there; and incontinently they knew what it was, and they began to be exceeding joyful, and to make great solace together. Then they dismissed this good man, and he went away about his own business; and they began to say to one another how he was a great simpleton. Remained all these three robbers together, to guard this treasure, and began to reason what they should do. One of them answered and said: 'It seems to me that since God has given us this high good fortune, we should not depart hence, until we carry away all this treasure.' And the other said: 'Let us not do so; let one of us take somewhat of it, and go to the city and sell it, and get bread and wine and whatsoever else we need, and on this errand let him use the best wit he has: let him so do, that he may furnish us forth.' To this agreed they all three together. Now the Devil, who is full of devices, and in his wickedness ordains as much evil as he can, put into the heart of him who went to the city for provisions, 'As soon as I am in the city (said he to himself), I will eat and drink as much as I need, and then provide myself with certain things for which I have use now at the present time; and then I will poison what I carry to my companions: so that when they shall both be dead, I shall be lord of all that treasure, and, as it seems to me, it is so great, that I shall be the richest man of all this country as regards my having;' and as it came to him in thought, so he did. He took meat for himself, as much as he needed, and then all the rest he poisoned, and so carried it to those his companions.

While he was going to the city, according as we have said, if he considered and devised evil to slay his com-

panions, to the end that all might remain to him, they on their part thought no better of him than he of them, and they said to one another: 'As soon as this comrade of ours shall return with bread and wine and with the other things which we need, we will slay him, and then we will eat what we want, and then all this great treasure will be between us two. And as we shall be fewer that share it, so much greater part will each of us have.' Now comes he who was gone to the city to buy the things of which they had need. When he was returned to his companions, straightway when they saw him, they were upon him with lances and with knives, and slew him. As soon as they had him dead, they ate of what he had brought; and as soon as they were filled, both fell down dead. And thus they died all three; for the one slew the other as you have heard, and had not the treasure. And so our Lord God pays traitors; for they went to seek death, and in this manner they found it, and in such way as they were worthy of. And the wise man wisely fled from it, and the gold remained without a master as at first.

It is easy to see why this tale should have been a popular one; it is in its nature essentially tragic, the catastrophe coming as a direct result of evil character; in the eagerness with which death is sought and the ease with which it is found, we have a perfect example of dramatic irony.

The effectiveness of the *Pardoner's Tale* depends first on the effectiveness of its theme, as shown in the Italian *novella*, and in hardly less measure on the setting which Chaucer has given to it. In the background of the story looms that most terrible and mysterious force, the plague, death raised to its highest power. In our Western world of sanitary science, widespread pestilence has ceased to be a matter

The Pardoner's Version.

of national experience. To realize what it means, we must read in our newspapers of its ravages in India or China, or better still, read the accounts of Thucydides or Boccaccio or DeFoe. But to Chaucer and his readers the plague was a matter of personal experience. Four times during the reign of Edward III, in 1348–49, 1361–63, 1369, and 1375–76, England was swept by pestilence. In the first of these plagues, the same which Boccaccio describes in the Introduction of the *Decameron*, we are told that half the population of England perished.

A highly interesting feature of Boccaccio's description of the plague is the account he gives of its varying effect on the moral tone of Florentine society. Some gave themselves up to religious exercise; others shut themselves up in their houses, ate the most nourishing food, and kept their minds occupied with pleasant topics; but many, in the conviction that to-morrow they should die, spent to-day in eating, drinking, and making merry. It is to this last class that the three 'riotours' of the *Pardoner's Tale* belong. In the Flemish town where the scene of the story is laid, a thousand victims have already fallen; but unchastened by the calamity, the three 'riotours' sit in drunken revelry at their tavern, though it is not yet nine of the day. Amid their laughter and oaths comes the solemn clink of the funeral bell. It is the corpse of one of their own friends, suddenly stricken as he sat drunk upon his bench. Though moved to no amendment of life, they are not sufficiently callous to continue their merry-making. In drunken rage they vow to seek out this false traitor Death and be revenged. The taverner has mentioned a great village a mile or more away, where not a human soul is left alive. Surely here victorious Death must keep his abode. The background darkens, as the

three 'riotours,' after taking that ill-kept oath of mutual faith, with swords drawn and their mouths full of curses, rush madly towards the city of Death. We feel already that doom hangs over them. They are what a Scotchman calls 'fey,' marked out for death. All this, it will be noticed, is absent from the Italian *novella*.

Chaucer now provides a contrast of overwhelming power. An old, poor man, 'al forwrapped save his face,' meets them at a stile, which marks, perhaps, the confines of the village they are seeking. It is 'crabbed age and youth,' drunken excitement and calm philosophic meditation.

> 'Ne deeth, allas! ne wol nat han my lyf;
> Thus walke I, lyk a restelees caityf,
> And on the ground, which is my modres gate,
> I knokke with my staf, bothe erly and late,
> And seye, "leve moder, leet me in!
> Lo, how I vanish, flesh, and blood, and skin!
> Allas! whan shul my bones been at reste?
> Moder, with yow wolde I chaunge my cheste,
> That in my chambre longe tyme hath be,
> Ye! for an heyre clout to wrappe me!"
> But yet to me she wol nat do that grace,
> For which ful pale and welked is my face.'

He, too, it seems, is a seeker after death. But who is he, this mysterious passenger? Whence comes he? whither goes he? Whose is the treasure that lies beneath the oak? and how came it there? To none of these questions does Chaucer so much as hint an answer. We feel that the old man is something other than the hermit of the Italian *novella;* the hermit was fleeing death, this man is seeking it. One of the 'riotours' accuses him of being Death's spy; we are tempted to believe that he is rather very Death himself. But Chaucer does not say so; he wraps him in

a mystery as deep as the mystery of death. The pale, withered face and heavily shrouded figure rise like a vapor, and fade as suddenly into thin air. Was he a reality or a vision? And the treasure, those eight bushels of gold florins, were they real and palpable, or only a dreadful mocking vision? Reality or vision, they have in them the power of deadly work.

The three doomed revelers run up the crooked way; but instead of grim, antic Death, they find what seems to them the very fullness of life. Here is provision for endless days and nights of dissipation. They are struck into silence by the vision. The clink of funeral bell, the mad quest of Death, the mysterious figure, all are forgotten. The fumes of drunkenness clear away. They are at once practical. No questions are asked; the money must be secured. Why care for Death? Here is life, and life in more abundance.

The cuts are drawn; the messenger is dispatched; the two plots are laid, and the poison is bought. A few brief strokes sketch in the triple murder.

> Thus ended been thise homicydes two,
> And eek the false empoysoner also.

Three dead bodies and a heap of worthless gold! They have found Death — the vanquisher. The strange old man totters on his way, tapping with his stick at the gates of our common grave, the earth, still seeking the death which these so readily have found. Will he ever find it? or is he doomed to a withering Tithonus-like immortality, deathless as Death itself?

This is the tale of the Pardoner, — full of tragic terror; dramatic in its structure, transacted as it is almost wholly in dialogue; never hurried, but marching forward with sure strides, unimpeded with a single superfluous detail, irresistible and inevitable as death and night.

As for the moral of it, one could draw morals enough if it were desirable. The miserable mountebank of a Pardoner sees in it only the exemplification of his favorite theme: *Radix malorum est cupiditas.*

One reads of the preacher Whitefield that, in addressing a seaman's mission in New York, he described a shipwreck with such vividness that a hardened old salt jumped to his feet and cried, 'Man the boats! she 'll sink!' And again that in Philadelphia the utilitarian skeptic Ben Franklin emptied his purse into the preacher's collection-box. With such a tale as this the Pardoner may well have passed off his spurious relics, and won the hundred marks a year which he boasts of as his income. The sublime audacity of the Pardoner, however, is reserved till the end of the tale, when in the glow of his oratory he offers his worthless relics to the very company to whom he has made an *exposé* of his lying methods. I hardly think he expected to win their silver; as we have seen, he is on a vacation. It is rather the conscious artist in hypocrisy, who wishes to give a crowning example of his art.

THE WIFE OF BATH'S PROLOGUE

The *Wife of Bath's Prologue* is a dramatic monologue in which a highly characterized, but at the same time a typical, woman of the middle class is made to reveal her own personality, narrate the events of her own life, and pronounce her opinions on the topic which is to her the most vital of our human life. At every step one is conscious of the new influences brought into our literature by the Italian Renaissance. The intense interest in all sorts and conditions of men, without which our great dramatic literature could never have been; the breaking down of class distinction, which makes a cloth-weaver 'of bisyde Bathe' fit subject for

a poet's verse, and gives to her thoughts and experiences a value as real as those of a countess or queen; and lastly, the almost revolutionary daring with which the poet makes his creation demolish the cherished mediæval ideal of celibacy, — all these proclaim the author of the *Wife of Bath's Prologue* as the first modern man of England, with the virtues and faults of our modern world.

Sources.

Though this composition is essentially one of Chaucer's most original productions, here as elsewhere he is indebted to 'olde bokes.' The original conception of the Wife of Bath is due, apparently, to an allegorical personage in the *Roman de la Rose* named La Vieille, a personage who, though first introduced in the earlier part of the poem by Guillaume de Lorris, is elaborated in Jean de Meun's satirical continuation of the work. But though the points of similarity are numerous, La Vieille remains, as her name indicates, an abstraction, or at most a type; while the Wife of Bath is a living, breathing woman. Other hints for the elaboration of the character Chaucer seems to have drawn from Jean de Meun's description of Le Jaloux, an old married man, who attributes to woman many of the qualities which the Wife of Bath eagerly claims for herself.[1] For the long discussion of celibacy, however, Chaucer has gone directly to a work of St. Jerome, used also by the author of the *Roman de la Rose*, known as *Hieronymus contra Jovinianum*, in which the holy father demolishes with much acerbity the argument of one Jovinian, who had ventured to write against the practice of celibacy. In the course of this argument Jerome inserts a long extract from a lost work of a Greek named Theophrastus, entitled

[1] See W. E. Mead, 'The Prologue of the Wife of Bath's Tale,' *Publications of the Modern Language Association of America*, 16. 388–404.

Liber Aureolus de Nuptiis. A further source is the *Epistola Valerii ad Rufinum de non Ducenda Uxore*, printed among the works of Jerome, though written much later. These three works, it will be observed, were all contained in the favorite volume of the Wife of Bath's fifth husband, the volume which the irate lady forces him to burn. The delicious humor of Chaucer's procedure consists in suffering the serious arguments of a father of the church to be quoted and refuted by such a one as the Wife of Bath. Bitter attacks on the frailty of woman were a commonplace of the old monastic literature; but Chaucer is engaged in no moral diatribe. Neither does he feel called upon to espouse the cause of woman vilified; in the spirit of the dramatist he creates a woman who not only exemplifies all that had been charged against woman, but who even glories openly in the possession of these qualities, and by his art forces us to take her point of view, and all but sympathize with her.

The Argument against Celibacy.

It is hard to say how far Chaucer himself was in sympathy with the views which the Wife of Bath propounds on the subject of marriage and virginity. That he was no mere glorifier of the sensual may go without saying; but that he recognized the fallacy of the prevailing ideal of celibacy, and that besides his merely dramatic interest in the Wife of Bath he was also interested in breaking down a false idol, is quite probable. Professor Lounsbury has called attention to the fact that Chaucer has twice put into the mouth of the Host, in his words to the Monk (B 3133–3154) and to the Nun's Priest (B 4637–4646), opinions of a similar character, and on the basis of these facts he calls the Wife's Prologue a 'revolutionary document,' in which the poet, shielding himself behind the ample figure of this clothmaker of

Bath, has spoken out with playful exaggeration his opinion on one of the questions of the day.

Whether Chaucer's or not, the opinions are revolutionary enough even at the present day. This fourteenth-century advocate of a return to nature is, however, so prolix in her speech, and so given to digression, that it is not wholly a work of supererogation to sum up briefly the argument she advances.

A little while ago she had been told that since Christ went to but one wedding, she too, the much-married, should have confined herself to a single husband. Then, too, what a sharp word Christ spoke to the woman of Samaria anent her five husbands, — precisely the number which the Wife has reached herself! But the good woman frankly confesses that the significance of that rebuke she has never been able to understand. There is another 'gentil text,' though, the meaning of which she can easily grasp, — the command to be fruitful and multiply. God never defined the number of husbands which might be taken.

> But of no nombre mencioun made he,
> Of bigamye or of octogamye.

(Notice the delicious coinage of a new word, necessary to contain the new wine of her advanced opinions.) Solomon had many wives at once. 'Would that similar liberty were allowed to me!' sighs the Wife of Bath.

So far, it will be noticed, the argument has dealt with second marriage; but there are those who recommend the avoidance of marriage altogether, and praise perpetual virginity. Yet God has never expressly commanded virginity, and the apostle, though he counsels it, does not enjoin it. Up to this point the discussion has consisted of an appeal to the authority of holy writ; the Wife now descends boldly to the ground of common sense. If every one should practice virginity,

who, pray, is to beget virgins and bring them forth? It may be that virginity is more excellent than the married state; very well, wooden vessels are needed in the household as well as golden. The Wife of Bath is quite contented with the humbler lot. Once more there is a bold appeal to common sense: it is the obvious intention of nature that man should marry and bring forth issue. Having established her point, she can afford to be generous to her opponents; they may follow virginity if they please: —

> I nil envye no virginitee;
> Lat hem be breed of pured whete-seed,
> And lat us wyves hoten barly-breed;
> And yet with barly-breed, Mark telle can,
> Our lord Jesu refresshed many a man.
> In swich estaat as god hath cleped us
> I wol persevere, I nam nat precious.

Despite its playful tone, the argument is a good one, and it may well be believed that Chaucer is at least half in earnest.

The chief interest of this Prologue lies not in its character as a controversial pamphlet, but in its portrayal of a human type. It is a great human document. The Wife of Bath.

Looked at superficially, the Wife of Bath is a thoroughly healthy animal, somewhat over forty, of substantial figure, dressed conspicuously, exceedingly coarse in her speech, but withal a friendly, good-natured woman, and by no means lacking in shrewd, practical wisdom. Though she has picked up many odds and ends of knowledge from her scholar-husband, Jankin, her manner of speech shows her to be essentially illiterate. Her whole theory of life is one of frank animalism. This is what one takes in at first glance, and this, probably, is all that her companions on the

Canterbury journey saw in her; but Chaucer saw more. He saw that with all her apparent gayety, she was not happy.

She begins her long preamble with mention of 'wo that is in mariage.' She argues at length to prove that marriage is the *summum bonum* of life, and she has had the singular good fortune to enter five times into this blessed state; surely she should know the quintessence of bliss. But none of her marriages has been fortunate; of her husbands she says: 'Three of hem were gode and two were badde;' but with none of them was she happy. The first three she had married for their money. They were too old to satisfy her lust; they chided and harangued her; they would not even give her money enough to satisfy her love of finery. The fourth husband was a reveler, who made her as jealous as she had made his predecessors. The fifth, clerk Jankin, tried to lord it over her, and told her uncomplimentary stories from his books. When she had at last won the mastery, he disobligingly died. Is not this 'tribulacioun in mariage'?

She is haunted, moreover, with a vague suspicion that, argue as she may to the contrary, her way of life is not the right one, a subconscious conviction that reaches masterful expression in the single exclamation:

> Allas! allas! that ever love was sinne!

A further proof of her failure to attain happiness is found in her restlessness. As the souls of the lustful in the first circle of the *Inferno* are blown about continually by the whirlwind, so she has been driven by her restlessness to seek strange lands. She has been to Rome, to Santiago in Spain, to Boulogne, to Cologne. Thrice she has made the long journey to Jerusalem. When we meet her, she is on the road to Canterbury.

It is the same insatiable lust for travel which marks the restlessness of our modern life.

Worst of all, the Wife of Bath is growing old. Married first at the age of twelve, she is already forty when she marries her fifth husband. She must now be nearing fifty. Her good days are done. If, as Horace tells us, no piety can give pause to wrinkles and sure-advancing age, neither can the impiety of rank animalism. It is not only 'indomitable death' whose approach she has to dread, but the dulling of the sharp edge of pleasure on which her fancied happiness depends.

> 'But age, allas! that al wol envenyme,
> Hath me biraft my beautee and my pith;
> Lat go, fare-wel, the devel go therwith!
> The flour is goon, ther is na-more to telle,
> The bren, as I best can, now moste I selle;
> But yet to be right mery wol I fonde.'

The spirit of reckless bravado in these lines cannot blind us to the terrible truth they contain. The last line in particular tells us that the gayety of her character is a forced gayety:—

> 'But yet to be right mery *wol I fonde.*'

There is, as Professor Lounsbury has said, a profound 'undertone of melancholy' running through all the apparent gayety of the piece.

It is this deeper significance of the character which we must urge against those who are tempted to quarrel with the Prologue on the score of morality. Chaucer has indeed chosen to depict an immoral woman, and he has allowed her to reveal herself with a coarse plainness of language which is sure to shock the fastidious of a more prudish age, and which may well have shocked the more fastidious of Chaucer's contemporaries; but we must remember that Chaucer has not apologized for

her immorality, nor attempted to represent it as other than it is. Some readers may find the poem disgusting; but no one can call it seductive. Chaucer has, moreover, preserved the moral balance by his clear appreciation of the fact that unstinted gratification of sense is not the road to happiness.

Chaucer himself seems to have been proud of this creation of his art, for three times he refers to the Wife of Bath in other poems,[1] and critics generally have agreed in placing the Prologue in the first rank of the poet's compositions. No one can deny that in it Chaucer's genius is shown in fullest measure; but in spite of its great interest as a human document, and its unquestioned technical excellence, sane criticism must recognize that its subject excludes it from the rank of highest art. Without doubt, Chaucer's portrayal of the Wife of Bath is a more dazzling achievement than his portrayal of Constance in the tale of the Man of Law; and yet the cause of true art and of humanity is furthered rather by the figure of Constance than by that of the Wife of Bath.

THE WIFE OF BATH'S TALE

Striking as is the revelation of herself which the Wife of Bath gives in her Prologue, we do not realize the full range of her character till we have read her tale. The central idea of the tale, that the highest wish of woman is to have sovereignty over husband and lover, is so eminently suited to the Wife of Bath that we are justified in assuming that Chaucer chose the tale with direct reference to the teller, and that he intended us to take the tale as well as the Prologue into account in estimating her character. One is surprised to find the tale so free from coarseness. Though in two passages

[1] In the *Clerk's Tale*, the *Merchant's Tale*, and the *Envoy to Bukton*.

at least the story offers opportunity for coarse treatment, it is marked throughout by its delicacy and grace. It is a tale of faery both in substance and in manner. Professor Lounsbury says of it: 'The tale is full of wisest observation, of keenest insight into character and motive. The incidents, moreover, are woven together so artistically, and follow each other so naturally, that the reader loses sight or thought of the central impossibility that lies at the foundation of the details which have been built upon it. More than all, the story, starting from the earth, lifts itself up to and loses itself in that poetical atmosphere to which nothing but the highest genius can attain.'[1] We must recognize, then, that beside the coarseness and the shrewd practicality of this woman, there runs a vein of really delicate imagination, a fact which will explain to us the undertone of melancholy which is perceptible in her coarsest talk.

This apparently incongruous coexistence of coarseness and delicacy furnishes us, I think, with the key to her whole character. I conceive of the Wife of Bath as endowed originally with strong passions and vivid imagination, with what we are wont to call the poetic temperament. Had she been born in a palace, she might have become your typical heroine of romance, her inevitable lapses from virtue gilded over with the romantic adornments of moonlight serenades and secret trysts. But born heiress to a weaver's bench, there was no chance for her poetic imaginativeness to develop. Laughed at by others for her fine-spun fancies, she would certainly grow ashamed of them herself. I can believe that her excessive coarseness of speech was originally an affectation assumed to conceal the natural fineness of her nature, an affectation which easily

[1] *Studies in Chaucer*, 3. 418.

became a second nature to her. Her strong passions demanded expression; and denied a more poetical gratification, and quite unrestrained by moral character, they expressed themselves in coarse vulgarity. It is only when called upon to tell a story, to leave the practical every-day world, in which she is forced to live, for the other world of fantasy, that the original imaginativeness of her nature finds opportunity to reveal itself. If this conception of the Wife of Bath be correct, her character becomes almost a tragic one, or at any rate belongs to that higher realm of comedy which borders on tears.

Sources.

Stories closely akin to that told by the Wife of Bath are found elsewhere in English literature. Gower tells essentially the same story, though in much less artistic form, in the first book of the *Confessio Amantis*. In Bishop Percy's folio manuscript there are two ballads — the *Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnell* and the *Marriage of Sir Gawaine* — which develop the same theme. Still another instance of the tale is the border ballad of *King Henrie* in Scott's *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border*. Similar stories of a loathly lady who becomes beautiful in her marriage-bed are found in Icelandic, Gaelic, French, German, and in the Orient. Indeed, the idea of disenchantment by a kiss is a common theme of fairy tales, as in the well-known nursery story of the Sleeping Beauty.[1]

Though Gower's version and Chaucer's are nearer akin to one another than to any other of the tales known to us, neither seems to have been direct source for the other. Dr. G. H. Maynadier,[2] who has gone most thoroughly into the question, believes that the tales of Chaucer and Gower go back ultimately to an Old

[1] See *Originals and Analogues*, pp. 481–524.

[2] *The Wife of Bath's Tale, its Sources and Analogues*, London, 1901.

Irish original; but his argument, though interesting, is so involved that one fails to be convinced by it.

The Friar, always ready, as the Summoner declares, to intermeddle in matters that do not concern him, has laughed at the undue length of the Wife's preamble to her tale. She does not immediately answer him; indeed, the loud-voiced Summoner gives her no chance; but when the Host has called the Friar and Summoner to order, she takes occasion, in the opening paragraph of her tale, to pay back her critic with a clever dig. Her tale is to be a fairy tale, and so she begins with the remark that

The Tale Itself.

> In th' olde dayes of the king Arthour,
> Of which that Britons speken greet honour,
> Al was this land fulfild of fayerye.
> The elf-queen, with hir joly companye,
> Daunced ful ofte in many a grene mede;

but now their place has been taken by these limiters and other holy friars: —

> For ther as wont to walken was an elf,
> Ther walketh now the limitour himself.

As a result of this change, —

> Wommen may go saufly up and doun,
> In every bush, or under every tree;
> Ther is noon other incubus but he,
> And he ne wol doon hem but dishonour.[1]

The Wife of Bath has introduced her tale and paid back the Friar at the same time; while the combination of delicate imagination with coarse insinuation serves admirably as a transition from the Prologue to the tale itself.

[1] I. e., 'He will not carry them off to fairy-land; he will only dishonor them.' This is the reading of Skeat's text and of the best MSS. The Globe Edition, following the Cambridge MS., reads: 'And he ne wol doon hem *non dishonour*,' which must, of course, be taken as sarcasm.

The story proceeds smoothly for a while, till the knight begins to collect answers to the riddle, 'What thing is it that wommen most desyren?' The Wife finds herself face to face again with the question she has debated in her Prologue; and fifty-seven lines are devoted to a discussion of the various answers suggested, and to the tale of Midas's wife (learned doubtless from husband number five). One may notice that she here returns for a while from the land of fiction to the problems of reality. This is suggested subtly by a change of tense, and by the introduction of the pronoun 'we,' which indicates her lively personal participation in the matter. Compare, for example, the

> Somme seyde, wommen loven best richesse

of line 925 with

> Somme seyde, that *our* hertes been most esed,
> When that *we* been yflatered and yplesed

of lines 929, 930, and with change to the present tense:

> And somme *seyn*, how that *we* loven best
> For to be free, and do right as *us* lest.

The story is resumed with the charmingly poetical vision of the four and twenty ladies dancing under a forest side, who vanish as the knight approaches. The picture is not elaborated as Spenser would have treated it;[1] it is merely suggested to the imagination. It is sufficient, however, to furnish us with the hint that the loathly lady is not of human kind. One may notice in passing how Chaucer has managed to introduce an element of surprise into the story. The hag does not, as in Gower, specify the condition on which she will extricate the knight from his difficulty, she merely demands the granting of her first request; not till after the knight's triumphant answer to the queen, is

[1] Cf. *Faerie Queene*, 6. 10. 10–18.

marriage mentioned. Nor does the reader learn the answer to the riddle till the knight speaks it out in full court.

Brought to the fulfillment of his pledge, the knight ungenerously, though not unnaturally, objects that his wife is loathly and old and come of low kind. This gives occasion for the long and excellent sermon on the nature of true nobility which occupies the last quarter of the tale: —

> Loke who that is most vertuous alway,
> Privee and apert, and most entendeth ay
> To do the gentil dedes that he can,
> And tak him for the grettest gentil man.

The noble ideas nobly expressed in this speech, which suggest familiar words of Burns and of Tennyson, though part of Chaucer's personal creed, as shown by their reappearance in his balade of *Gentilesse*, are not his original discovery. A similar strain of democracy may be found in Dante, in Petrarch, in Boccaccio, and in the *Roman de la Rose*. Some exception has been taken, however, to the dramatic appropriateness of such sentiments to the character of the Wife of Bath. Ten Brink says, for example: 'The thoroughly sound moral of the long sermon given by the wise old woman, before her metamorphosis, to her young, unwilling husband, comes more from the heart of the poet than from the Wife of Bath.'[1] But is not the Wife of Bath, as a prosperous member of the middle class, precisely the person to assert that true gentility is not the peculiar possession of the nobly born? If the poet has lent to these lines a tone of higher poetry than the Wife can be conceived capable of, he has done only what Shakespeare does continually. The function of the dramatist is not that of the mere reporter.

[1] *History of English Literature* (English trans.), 2. 163.

Another possible objection that may be urged against this passage is that so long a digression interrupts too seriously the progress of the tale. On the contrary, it is an artistic device of the highest skill. A loathly hag is to be transformed suddenly into a beautiful lady. Such a process makes a large draught on our powers of belief. The high poetry of the long discourse serves to bridge over the change; our minds are for the time being diverted from what is going on. We are held captive by the spell of her poetry, and at the conclusion of the speech are not surprised to find that the speaker is of wondrous beauty. As a further instance of Chaucer's art in the management of the metamorphosis, we may notice that he refrains from any *detailed* description either of her ugliness or of her beauty. Our minds are less startled by the change from ugliness in general to beauty in general than by that of a definite type of ugliness into a definite type of beauty.

The tale is one of Chaucer's poetic triumphs.

THE FRIAR'S TALE

At the conclusion of the Wife of Bath's long preamble, it will be remembered, the Friar had 'intermeddled' with a derisive laugh at the good woman's long-windedness, and had been promptly called to order by the Summoner. Each promised to tell a tale which should not be complimentary to the other's profession; and only with difficulty could the Host calm them down, and win a hearing for the Wife of Bath. All through this enforced silence, the quarrel has been smouldering; and the Friar has cast dark looks upon his natural foe. When Dame Alice has ended, the Friar hastens to seize the opportunity to strike the first blow. His tale is ably paid back by the Summoner; and each reader must decide for himself which comes

out better in this war of tales. The enmity of the Friar and the Summoner is not come of new; their quarrel is the quarrel of their professions. The Summoner belongs to the organization of the so-called secular clergy, which includes the parish priests, the archdeacons, and the bishops. The Friar, as a member of a mendicant order, belongs to the so-called religious clergy — those who had taken definite religious vows, and belonged to world-wide organizations, which held authority directly from the Pope, and were independent of the jurisdiction of the national church. Such a co-existence of separate ecclesiastical organizations within the same realm gave rise, of course, to endless jars; for the religious clergy were continually encroaching on the privileges of their secular brethren, and the latter not unnaturally tried to curb their power. Thus the Friar boasts that he and his order are outside the Summoner's jurisdiction; to which the Summoner gives countercheck quarrelsome by the answer that so are 'the wommen of the styves.' Since we know that the Friar could rage 'as it were right a whelpe,' and since the 'fyr-reed cherubines face' of the Summoner portends a choleric disposition, their quarrel was a foregone conclusion. As it was apparently Chaucer's purpose to show up both professions impartially, he chose the clever device of 'making each of these rascals demolish the other,' a device which serves also to heighten the dramatic realism of the Canterbury pilgrimage.

Sources.

The *Friar's Tale* is merely an application to the profession of the Summoner of a popular anecdote, previously told at the expense of a bailiff or a lawyer, but equally appropriate to any other unpopular functionary. Two analogues to Chaucer's tale are given in the Chaucer Society's volume of

Originals and Analogues. The first of these, and the one which illustrates most clearly what the poet had to build on, is found in a volume, printed probably about 1480, written by a Dominican friar named John Herolt, which is intended as a help to sermon-writers. The second section of the work contains a series of short anecdotes which a preacher might find useful as examples to point his moral. Among them is the story just referred to. Of course this volume appeared nearly a century later than the *Canterbury Tales;* but the anecdote may well have been in circulation long before. If Chaucer found it in some similar work on sermon-writing, its appropriateness to the preaching Friar is very obvious. The heightened effectiveness of Chaucer's tale, which, in the absence of any evidence to the contrary, we may suppose due to his own genius, is clearly shown by a comparison with this Latin *Narrative of a certain Wicked Seneschal* which I shall give here in translation.

There was a certain man, a seneschal and lawyer, a calumniator of the poor, and a despoiler of goods of every sort. One day he went to court to bring a suit, and to enrich himself. A certain man met him in the way and said to him, 'Where are you going? and what is your business?' The first man answered, 'I am going to make money.' And the second said, 'I am just such a one as you. Let 's go together.' When the first man consented to this, the second said to him, 'How do you make your money?' And he answered, 'The substance of the poor, as long as they have anything, which I get by law-suits and prosecutions, either justly or unjustly. Now I have told you how I make my money, tell me, prithee, how do you make yours?' The second answered him and said, 'I put down to my profit everything that is given to the devil in curses.'

The first man laughed, and made fun of the second, not knowing that he was the devil. After a little, as they were going through a town, they heard a poor man curse a calf, which he was leading to market, because it would not go straight; and they also heard a similar curse from a woman who was beating her boy. Then said the first to the second, 'Here's a chance for you to make money if you wish. Take the boy and the calf.' The second answered, 'I can't, because they are not cursing from their hearts.' Now when they had gone a little further, a band of poor men came along, going to the law-court, and seeing the seneschal, they all began to hurl curses at him with one accord. And the second said to the first, 'Do you hear what they say?' 'I hear,' said he, 'but it makes no difference to me.' And the second said, 'They are cursing from their hearts, and giving you over to the devil, and so you shall be mine.' And straightway he snatched him up and disappeared with him.[1]

This is a clever and diverting anecdote; but Chaucer's tale is something more. We may notice first of all the heightened realism given by the detailed description of the Summoner and his methods, and of the fiend, as he rides in his gay disguise of yeoman's green; by the vivid picture of the carter urging his horses, Brok and Scot, through the heavy slough, whacking them and cursing them while the wagon sticks, calling down all the blessings of heaven upon them when the wheels begin to turn; and by the half-humorous, half-pathetic figure of old Mabely indignantly repelling the Summoner's persecution, wishing him and the new pan, which he covets, both to the devil together. The dialogue between the

Chaucer's Tale.

[1] Still another analogue, from the Zürich poet, Usteri (1763–1827), is given by F. Vetter in *Anglia, Beiblatt*, 13. 180, 181.

two travelers is, as Ten Brink calls it, a little masterpiece. Though he is entertaining him unawares, the Summoner finds the fiend such eminently congenial company, that he immediately pledges him a life-long friendship. Shameless as he is, he none the less tries to hide the fact of his detested calling: —

> He dorste nat, for verray filthe and shame,
> Seye that he was a somnour, for the name.

Deliciously humorous is the series of hints by which the fiend gradually reveals his true identity. He, too, is a sort of bailiff, who must gather in his lord's rents. As for his dwelling-place, it is 'fer in the north contree' (the region where Lucifer set up his power);[1] the yeoman hopes to see his new friend there some day; he will give him such clear directions before they part, that he cannot possibly miss it. The fiend's account of his own unscrupulous methods draws from the Summoner a frank confession that he makes off with everything that he can find, 'but-if it be to hevy or to hoot.' The Summoner must know the name of this stranger so completely after his own heart.

> This yeman gan a litel for to smyle.
> 'Brother,' quod he, 'wiltow that I thee telle?
> I am a feend, my dwelling is in helle.'

The Summoner is naturally a little startled at the revelation, but not for long; he is not the man to give up so charming an acquaintance for a trifling circumstance. One may be a little taken aback on discovering that a chance acquaintance is a rabid anarchist or violent atheist. If he is well dressed, and a gentleman, we can pardon him some eccentricities of belief; and

[1] The hell of Teutonic mythology was located in the north, as the region of darkness. A false interpretation of Isaiah 14. 12–14 may have helped to incorporate the same idea into Christian myth. Cf. Milton, *Paradise Lost*, 5. 755.

then, too, a man of revolutionary tendencies is so interesting. The Summoner begins immediately to question him on the 'privitees' of a fiend's existence. The fiend, who, we may notice, has a supreme contempt for the speculations of theologians —

I do no fors of your divinitee —

obligingly satisfies his curiosity, so far as these things can be explained to a mere mortal. Hereafter, he promises, the Summoner shall come where he needs no further teaching: —

For thou shalt by thyn owene experience
Conne in a chayer rede of this sentence
Bet than Virgyle, whyl he was on lyve,
Or Dant also.

The Summoner may be professor of demonology, if he wishes, and lecture from a professional chair draped in the red, not of a doctor of divinity, but the red glare of hell-fire.

There is one moment of suspense, just before the tale reaches its catastrophe. Old Mabely wishes the Summoner to the devil with all her heart, but with one proviso, 'but he wol him repente.' The Summoner, who has surely had warning enough of what he is to expect, who was quick enough to suggest to his diabolic friend that the carter's horses were legitimate prey, is fatally blind. Proudly he asserts that he has no intention of repenting, and the fiend bears him off body and soul to hell,

Wher-as that somnours han hir heritage.

THE SUMMONER'S TALE

Once, near the beginning of the Friar's tale, the Summoner could not refrain an interruption; but, on the whole, he kept himself very well in hand, knowing that the hour of his revenge was near. At the end

of the tale, however, he is quaking like an aspen leaf for wrath, and, unable to wait for the slower revenge of his tale, serves an *hors d'œuvre* in the shape of a not very savory anecdote, which describes the particular place in hell reserved for these cursed friars. If the Friar has been able to tell much of the true nature of fiends, it is no wonder, for

> Freres and feendes been but lyte a-sonder.

The tale of the Summoner is, as far as our present knowledge suffers us to say, mainly original. The central idea of it, to be sure, may very well have been suggested by an old French story, the *Tale of the Priest's Bladder*, versified by one Jakes de Basiu.[1] This story tells of a priest near Antwerp, who is visited on his death-bed by two Jacobin friars, who beg an offering. He has already made his will, and at first refuses them outright; but when they are importunate, he bids them come next day with their prior, and he will give them a jewel which he would not part with for a thousand silver marks. The jewel turns out to be his own bladder, which they may cleanse and use for a pepper-box; and the friars go home, laughed at of all. Quite possibly Chaucer knew some variant of this tale, now lost to us. The definite localization of the incident at Holderness in Yorkshire makes this probable. If such a variant existed, it probably contained the change in the nature of the bequest, and the germ, at least, of the closing scene in the hall of the lord, where the young squire wins a new gown by his clever resolution of the problem which the churl had set. We may assume, with some

Sources.

[1] The tale is given by Legrand d'Aussy in his collection of *Fabliaux ou Contes, Fables et Romans du XIIe et du XIIIe Siècle* (1829). It is reprinted in *Originals and Analogues of Some of Chaucer's Canterbury Tales*, pp. 137–144.

confidence, that the long hypocritical prediction with which Friar John favors the bed-rid churl, and the perfect life-likeness of the scene, are Chaucer's original addition.

Some readers, I suppose, will be offended at the coarseness of the *Summoner's Tale*. Coarse it certainly is in its closing portion, but not in the least vicious. So callous is the wretched friar of the tale in his miserable hypocrisies, that he needs a coarse insult by way of discipline. Indeed, the outspoken frankness of the conclusion comes as a positive relief after the sanctimonious pretenses of the friar. As for the coarseness of old Thomas, we may dismiss that as does the lady in the castle, whither the irate friar has betaken himself for redress: —

The Summoner's Tale.

I seye, a cherl hath doon a cherles dede;

as for the coarseness of the squire, that is so ingenious that it is surely forgivable.

But the real literary value of the *Summoner's Tale* lies not in the plot of it, however artistically conducted, so much as in the masterful portrait of the dissembling friar. James Russell Lowell has called attention to the rich suggestiveness of the line: —

And fro the bench he droof awey the cat.

'We know without need of more words that he has chosen the snuggest corner.' Admirable, too, is the picture of the good-wife with her kindly hospitality, her openness to flattery, and her ample faith in the efficacy of Friar John's prayers, contrasting sharply with the companion picture of her churlish husband and his rough incredulity.

At the shameless hypocrisy of the friar, one knows not whether to laugh or to weep. So complete a master is he of the art of shamming that, even in his trans-

port of rage, he remembers to protest at the title of 'master' which the lord bestows on him: —

> 'No maister, sire,' quod he, 'but servitour,
> Thogh I have had in scole swich honour.
> God lyketh nat that "Raby" men us calle,
> Neither in market ne in your large halle;'

a disclaimer which is careful to specify that the title is not at all inappropriate. The only thing he forgets is, that for a preacher who has so ably denounced the sin of wrath, it is hardly consistent to give such an eminent example of the sin in his own person: —

> He looked as it were a wilde boor;
> He grinte with his teeth, so was he wrooth.

All this is humorous enough on the surface of things; but to one who knows something of the high ideals which St. Francis and St. Dominic set before their orders of mendicants, and something of the great work for humanity, and for true religion, which these orders achieved in the early days of their purity, this picture of degradation has more of tragedy than of comedy. It is precisely the greatest tragedy and the most inexplicable mystery of our little life, that the great institutions founded by our wisest and best for the attainment of the noblest aims should, almost without exception, develop, sooner or later, into instruments of positive evil. The friar does not sin in ignorance; his long sermon shows that he had all the precepts of his pious founder at the tip of his oily tongue; but these precepts have become a hollow mockery, and worse. Unfortunately, the testimony of Chaucer does not stand alone. Boccaccio, Gower, Langland, and Wiclif, men of very diverse temperaments and prejudices, all agree with Chaucer in painting the mendicant orders as hopelessly corrupt — a thinly whited sepulchre filled with dead men's bones.

CHAPTER XII

THE CANTERBURY TALES, GROUPS E, F, G, H, I

THE CLERK'S TALE

Apparently the university students of the fourteenth century were as diverse a lot as those of the present day. Clerk Nicholas of the *Miller's Tale*, with his gay sautrye,' and the two Cambridge students who take their mischievous revenge on the Miller of Trumpington, represent one species of the genus; while the poor clerk of the Canterbury pilgrimage belongs to the class which we thoughtlessly dismiss with the word 'grind.' Lean he is of figure, sober of his bearing, threadbare as to his coat: —

> For him was lever have at his beddes heed
> Twenty bokes, clad in blak or reed,
> Of Aristotle and his philosophye,
> Than robes riche, or fithele, or gay sautrye.
> . . . . . .
> Of studie took he most cure and most hede.

Sharply contrasted with the ready assurance of 'hende Nicholas' is the bashful reserve of this nameless Clerk of Oxenford: —

> 'Sir clerk of Oxenford,' our hoste sayde,
> 'Ye ryde as coy and stille as dooth a mayde,
> Were newe spoused, sitting at the bord;
> This day ne herde I of your tonge a word.
> I trow ye studie aboute som sophyme.'

So academic is his bearing, that the Host feels it necessary to request that he refrain from preaching, and from too scholarly a manner of speech. But the Clerk is no

mere mechanical 'grind.' We discover the eager play of an active and original mind in his very way of speaking, 'short and quik, and ful of hy sentence.' It is a delight to see the sudden flash of enthusiasm with which he refers to the great and worthy clerk, Fraunceys Petrark. That he is by no means lacking in a healthy vein of roguish humor, the closing stanzas of his tale show clearly enough. That the Host's warning against too lofty and pedantic a style was superfluous, the tale itself may bear witness. It is written in 'an honest method, as wholesome as sweet, and by very much more handsome than fine.'

Sources.

In response to the Host's command to tell a tale, the Clerk says:—

> I wol yow telle a tale which that I
> Lerned at Padowe of a worthy clerk,
> As preved by his wordes and his werk.
> He is now deed and nayled in his cheste,
> I prey to god so yeve his soule reste!
> Fraunceys Petrark, the laureat poete,
> Highte this clerk.

Chaucer's tale of Griselda is, indeed, only a close translation of Petrarch's *Fable of Obedience and Wifely Faith*, which is in its turn a somewhat freer Latin rendering of the tenth *novella* of the tenth day in Boccaccio's *Decameron*. Prefixed to Petrarch's rendering of the tale is a Latin letter to Boccaccio telling how the translation came to be made. Though Petrarch and Boccaccio were close friends, and though the *Decameron* had been written at least twenty years earlier, Petrarch seems not to have read it till a year or two before his death, which occurred in 1374. Even then Petrarch found the book too big to read through. He merely glanced over the greater part of it, reading carefully only the introductory description of the plague and

the concluding tale of Griselda. The latter impressed him so deeply that he committed it to memory, and was in the habit of repeating it to his friends. Wishing to make it current among those who knew no Italian, he found leisure to turn it into Latin, retelling it in his own words, adding and changing a little here and there. That Chaucer used Petrarch's version rather than Boccaccio's original we know from the Clerk's explicit statement. Independently of that, a comparison of the three versions establishes the fact beyond shadow of doubt. Great as is Chaucer's debt to Boccaccio, we have no evidence that he ever read a line of the work on which Boccaccio's fame now chiefly rests. The problem of Boccaccio's sources for the tale is a puzzling one, and fortunately is of no immediate concern to the student of Chaucer. We may notice, however, that the tale is found in a collection of French *Fabliaux, ou Contes du XIIIe et du XIIIIe Siècle*, edited by Le Grand (1781).[1]

The Supposed Meeting of Chaucer and Petrarch.

If the question of Chaucer's source for the *Clerk's Tale* is a simple one, very complicated is the question as to the exact way in which Petrarch's fable reached him. The Clerk of Oxenford is made to say that he learned the tale at Padua from the worthy clerk, Fraunceys Petrark; and this has been taken to mean that Chaucer himself heard the story from Petrarch's lips. At first blush there is much to lend probability to this interpretation. Petrarch's version of the tale was made in 1373, while the 'laureat poete' was actually living at Arqua, a suburb of Padua; and 1373 is the date of Chaucer's first visit to Italy. What more likely than that Chaucer should have sought out the chief man of letters in all Italy,

[1] An abstract of the *fabliau* is given in *Originals and Analogues to Some of Chaucer's Canterbury Tales*, pp. 527–537.

and that Petrarch, who, we know, was in the habit of reciting the tale to his friends, should have entertained his guest with the fable of Griselda? If it is objected that Chaucer's version follows Petrarch's so closely that he must have had the Latin text before him as he wrote, it is plausibly suggested that Petrarch presented his visitor with a manuscript of the tale as a parting gift. Professor Skeat is so sure of the interpretation that he insists that any one who doubts it must accuse Chaucer of deliberate falsehood. Chaucer's romantic biographer, Godwin, even tells us just how the two poets felt on meeting, and what each said to the other.

Nevertheless, there have long been skeptics to doubt this pleasing theory. Professor Lounsbury, after calling attention to the fact that the *Canterbury Tales* is a dramatic composition, and that it is the Clerk of Oxenford and not Chaucer who says he learned the tale from Petrarch at Padua, sums up with the sentence: 'We can creditably and honestly try hard to think that the two poets met; but with the knowledge we at present possess, we have no right to assert it.'[1] Much as we should like to believe a story which appeals so strongly to our sense of what ought to have been, I fear that in view of recent investigations, even the cautious position of Professor Lounsbury is no longer tenable. Mr. F. J. Mather, after carefully investigating the exact date of Petrarch's composition of the fable, and the chronology of Chaucer's Italian journey, and looking into the conditions of traveling in the fourteenth century, has come to the following conclusions.[2] For Petrarch's translation of the Griselda story 'any date in the early months of 1373 is possible, any date earlier

[1] *Studies in Chaucer*, 1. 68.

[2] 'On the asserted meeting of Chaucer and Petrarca,' *Modern Language Notes*, 12. 1–11.

than April is improbable.' The mission of which Chaucer was a member was sent primarily to conduct business at Genoa. Leaving England on December 1, 1372, it could not have reached Genoa much before February 1, 1373.[1] On reaching Genoa, Chaucer was detached from his associates and sent on special business to Florence. Supposing that he made no stay in Genoa, he may have been in Florence about February 10. He was apparently back in Genoa by March 23. The length of his possible stay in Florence is thus seen to be only a few weeks; and diplomatic business is usually not very quickly dispatched. Moreover, a journey from Florence to Padua, easy enough in the day of railways, was then to be accomplished only by a long and dangerous ride over mountain roads, still made difficult by the winter's snow. It seems improbable that Chaucer made this wide détour, but if he did, he could not have been in Padua later than March 15, a date too early for the probable composition of Petrarch's Latin version.

We cannot assert positively that Petrarch and Chaucer did not meet; but in the absence of any positive evidence of their meeting, we must admit that the probabilities are strongly against it. As for Chaucer's actual possession of the tale, Mr. Mather has shown that it speedily became popular, and that manuscripts of it were early multiplied. That Petrarch was dwelling near Padua, Chaucer might easily have learned without coming within two hundred miles of the place.

What we shall think of the *Clerk's Tale* will be largely determined by what we think of the woman about whose personality the whole

Griselda the Patient.

[1] An allowance of two months for the journey to Genoa is probably excessive. On his second Italian voyage of 1378, Chaucer was absent from England less than four months. The second journey, however, was made in the summer, when traveling was doubtless easier.

action centres. We are shown a young peasant-girl of blameless life, who is suddenly taken from her daily round of unremitting toil and frugal simplicity to be made first lady of a great domain. The sweet nobility of her character is raised far above the play of outward circumstance. She fills her new station as naturally and simply as she had tended sheep or turned her spinning-wheel; she gives to her husband the same unfeigned, unstinted love and devotion that she had given to her old and feeble father. With a character such as this, and with great beauty of person as its fitting shrine, it is no wonder that Marquis Walter loved her, and that his people came to look upon her as the brightest star of all their land. A character which can stand sudden prosperity without receiving a flaw can also stand adversity. With unquestioning obedience she suffers her children to be snatched from her, and herself to be supplanted by an unknown rival. The crowning instance of her wonderful patience is her prayer to Walter to spare his new-found lady: —

> 'O thing biseke I yow and warne also,
> That ye ne prikke with no tormentinge
> This tendre mayden, as ye han don mo;
> For she is fostred in hir norishinge
> More tendrely, and, to my supposinge,
> She coude nat adversitee endure
> As coude a povre fostred creature.'

Here is no word of reproach; though the reproach inevitably implied is heavy enough. Notice the carefully guarded phrase, 'as ye han don mo,' where *mo* means not *me* but *more*, 'as you have done to others.'[1]

[1] Petrarch's Latin reads: 'Unum bona fide te precor ac moneo, ne hanc illis aculeis agites, quibus alteram agitasti.' Boccaccio is a little more definite: 'Ma quanto posso vi priego, che quelle punture, le quali *all' altra, che vostra fu*, gia deste, non diate a questa.' (But I beg you with all my might that you give not to this woman those pricks which you gave to the other who was yours.)

What are we to think of this matchless patience? Most modern readers, particularly women readers, I suppose, will think it ridiculous, if not positively criminal. Imagine a convention of woman's rights advocates debating the conduct of Griselda! 'Miserable, weak-spirited creature!' one hears them shriek. But those were the days when women still promised at the altar to obey their lords, and considered the promise as something more than a meaningless phrase. Moreover, Griselda was not only her husband's wife, but his subject as well; and the obligation of the vassal to obey the lord was only less sacred than man's obligation to obey his God. Griselda merely lives up strictly to the letter and spirit of her obligation, and, one may add, to the letter and spirit of the command that we 'resist not evil,' a command which our modern world has agreed to ignore. But, some one exclaims, is not a woman's first duty to protect her offspring, and is not Griselda virtually an accomplice before the act to what she supposes to be the murder of her children? A duty, doubtless, and a sacred one; but by what authority do we call it her 'first duty'? Mothers have been known to urge their sons on to almost certain death in battle; and the deed has been called one of noble patriotism. There is an old story, not yet quite forgotten, of a father who stood ready to sacrifice an only son, at what he believed to be the command of his God. He may have been mistaken; Griselda may have been mistaken; perhaps we shall one day be so civilized that the Spartan mother will no longer be held up as a model. The question of precedence in moral duties is a more troublesome one than any that has vexed the master of ceremonies at a court *levée;* and each age must be left to settle the matter for itself. Griselda merely put in practice what all her contemporaries held in theory. Petrarch was a man of

enlightened views, far in advance of his age; yet it did not occur to him to question the rightness of her conduct. He tells, in one of his letters, how he once gave the tale to a friend, and asked him to read it aloud. The friend broke down in the middle of the reading, and could not continue for his tears. I am not arguing the question on its merits; I merely insist that he who would read the tale aright must imaginatively think himself into the spirit of a time long past, in which men held principles quite other than ours, but in which, as in our own, there were found those who would answer unflinchingly to the stern voice of duty. Unquestioning obedience to duty is a quality too noble and too rare in any age to suffer us to question too nicely the occasion which calls it forth. The tale is, as Ten Brink calls it, 'the Song of Songs of true and tender womanhood.'

Just what Chaucer himself thought of Griselda is not entirely clear to me. At the conclusion of the tale he makes the teller say: —

> This storie is seyd, nat for that wyves sholde
> Folwen Grisilde as in humilitee,
> For it were importable, though they wolde;
> But for that every wight, in his degree,
> Sholde be constant in adversitee
> As was Grisilde.

The difficulty of interpretation lies in the word 'importable,' which means 'unbearable.'[1] Does it mean that such conduct would be unbearable to others, or that a woman who should strive to follow Griselda would be unable to bear the strain? The context seems to me to favor the latter interpretation, in which case we shall conclude that Chaucer considered Griselda's humility entirely right, but for the majority of women an unattainable ideal. The roguish reference to the Wife of Bath, and

[1] Cf. *Canterbury Tales*, B 3792: 'His peynes weren importable.'

the humorous envoy which follow are merely intended to restore the playful tone which Chaucer wished should dominate the *Canterbury Tales*.

One dramatic problem of peculiar difficulty is presented by the character of the Marquis, Griselda's husband. The plot of the story demands that he shall act with wanton cruelty, and cause his wife twelve years of needless sorrow. Yet it was not possible to paint him as a heartless villain; for Griselda must not only obey him, but love him. This fundamental inconsistency cannot be removed; but the art of the story is shown in the extent to which it is concealed.

The Marquis Walter.

The opening sections of the tale present him in a distinctly favorable light. He is young, handsome, and good-natured: —

> A fair persone, and strong, and yong of age,
> And ful of honour and of curteisye,
> Discreet ynogh his contree for to gye.

All his people love him, both lords and commons. He has no vices; in light-hearted carelessness he spends his time a-hawking and a-hunting. Though he was

> To speke as of linage,
> The gentilleste yborn of Lumbardye,

he is quick to discern the true nobility of a peasant girl; and, far from entertaining any dishonorable designs upon her, is ready to make her his wife, and treat her as his equal. It is easy to see the grounds of his general popularity.

Yet, withal, there is an unlovely side to his nature; he is essentially selfish, a spoiled child. He neglects affairs of state, thinking only of his own pleasure. It is obviously his duty to marry and beget an heir; yet he prefers bachelor freedom, and has to be reminded of his duty by a delegation of his subjects. He is too

good-natured to refuse the request; but willfully declines the offer of his lords to choose a fitting consort for him, and asserts his liberty of action by flying in the face of conventionality and wedding a peasant. There is surely as much of pride as of generosity in his action; and one is tempted, too, to think that he foresees less interference to his liberty from a wife who is his inferior.

He has his way, weds Griselda, and is proud to find his eccentric choice justified by Griselda's popularity, and by her dignity in her new position. He is fond of her as a spoiled boy is fond of a favorite horse, and in mere pride of possession proceeds to put her through her paces. As the reckless horseman is not contented that his mare can take an ordinary hedge or ditch, but keeps trying her at harder barriers to test the limits of her excellence, so Walter devises still harder tests of his wife's patience and obedience. He does not mean to be cruel; he believes in his wife, and intends to set all right in the end; he loves her after a selfish fashion. Even when all is over, he feels no particle of remorse; he has restored to her her children and the incomparable blessing of his own love. But those twelve years!

THE MERCHANT'S TALE

Whatever Chaucer may have thought of Griselda as an ideal of womanhood, he was quite aware that actual realizations of the ideal are not over-numerous. The fabulous Chichevache, who feeds only on patient wives, is never in danger of a surfeit. Having depicted a wife of the type of Griselda, the poet restores the balance of actuality by telling, in the person of the Merchant, the not very edifying tale of January and May.

As seen at the Tabard Inn, on the eve of the Canterbury pilgrimage, no one would have suspected the skeleton in the prosperous merchant's domestic closet. His

forked beard, his Flemish beaver hat, his 'botes clasped faire and fetisly,' his self-satisfied manner of speech, —

> Souninge alway th'encrees of his winning,

suggest no hidden tragedy. But he has listened with strange feelings to the Clerk's story of Griselda, who suffered twelve long years without a murmur. He, poor man, has been married but two months, —

> 'And yet, I trowe, he that al his lyve
> Wyflees hath been, though that men wolde him ryve
> Unto the herte, ne coude in no manere
> Tellen so muchel sorwe, as I now here
> Coude tellen of my wyves cursednesse!'

The Host, it will be remembered, has some experience in conjugal infelicity, and readily enough gives the Merchant leave to tell his tale.

Sources.

The greater part of the *Merchant's Tale* is, as far as we know, Chaucer's original creation; only the climax of the tale, the scene in the garden, where the blind husband recovers his sight just in time to witness his wife's infidelity, and is persuaded that all was done for his own good, can be traced to an earlier original. The particular version of this 'pear-tree story' which Chaucer used is not known to us; but several analogous tales, European and Oriental, are given in the Chaucer Society's volume of *Originals and Analogues*,[1] which may be read and compared by those who think it worth while to trace the genesis of a tale which was hardly worth telling in the first place. Of these analogues, the best known is the ninth *novella* of the seventh day in Boccaccio's *Decameron*. This, though obviously a related tale, differs materially from the version Chaucer must have followed, the element of the husband's blindness being entirely lacking. Even in the portion of the tale which is borrowed, Chaucer's

[1] Pp. 177–188, 341–364.

originality may be seen. As Tyrwhitt says: 'Whatever was the real origin of this tale, the machinery of the faeries which Chaucer has used so happily, was probably added by himself; and indeed, I cannot help thinking that his Pluto and Proserpina were the true progenitors of Oberon and Titania, or rather, that they themselves have, once at least, deigned to revisit our poetical system under the latter names.'

Chaucer's tale has been retold by Pope under the title of *January and May*.[1]

The Tale Itself.

Whatever one may think of the merits of the *Merchant's Tale*, it will not do to dismiss it, as does a recent writer on Chaucer, as a mere 'tale of harlotry;' for the poet's chief interest in the story centres not in its adulterous *dénouement*, but in the humorous character-sketch of old January. The doting gray-beard has spent his godless life in unbridled wantonness; and now that he is sixty years and more, and the spark of desire is burning low, he decides that the comfort and happiness of his declining years, and incidentally the salvation of his soul, will be furthered by a tardy entrance into 'that holy bond with which that first God man and womman bond.' Only a young and beautiful wife will answer the purpose; and with such a one old January foresees a life of unmixed bliss: —

> For wedlok is so esy and so clene,
> That in this world it is a paradys.

The sage counsels of Justinus, who urges objections manifold, avail as much as good advice usually avails a man who is already decided: —

> For whan that he himself concluded hadde,
> Him thoughte ech other mannes wit so badde,

[1] For a comparison of Pope's version with the original, see the article by A. Schade, in *Englische Studien*, 25. 1–130, 26. 161–228.

That inpossible it were to replye
Agayn his chois, this was his fantasye.

The sycophant, Placebo, who is clever enough to argue on the popular side, bears away the palm for wisdom. Exceedingly delicate is the irony with which Chaucer manages this debate, and proclaims the unending happiness of the married state, while making it quite apparent all the while that for January the roseate vision is to be but mockery. So plausible is the sarcastic praise of marriage that the passage beginning: —

For who can be so buxom as a wyf?
Who is so trewe, and eek so ententyf
To kepe him, syk and hool, as is his make?

has actually been quoted, in all seriousness, to show Chaucer's 'perception of a sacred bond, spiritual and indestructible, in true marriage between man and woman'![1]

Foredoomed inevitably to failure, this senseless union of 'crabbed age and youth' is rendered yet more absurd by the elaborate marriage-feast, which Chaucer, contrary to his usual custom, has described at length, but described with an irony all the more biting because of its apparent good faith: —

Whan tendre youthe hath wedded stouping age,
Ther is swich mirthe that it may nat be writen.

When, in the sequel, the entirely natural happens, and 'faire fresshe May' plays false with her marriage vows, she carries our sympathies with her. Not that we approve of her conduct exactly, but our attention is diverted from the merely lascivious in the tale, and from the moral questions involved, to the eminent poetic justice of old January's cuckoldom. An immoral tale is made to subserve a sort of crude morality.

[1] *The Prologue, Knight's Tale*, etc., edited by Richard Morris, Oxford, 1895, p. xviii, and Morley, *English Writers*, 2. 135, 256, 286.

Even when the faithless wife occupies the centre of attention, it is the cleverness of her intrigue, and the sublime audacity of her inspired self-vindication, rather than her sensual desires which interest us; while the delicate conceit of an overruling providence in the persons of Pluto and Proserpine, king and queen of faery, who sagely debate the wisdom of King Solomon and of Jesus *filius Syrak*, relieves the essential coarseness of the tale. Even in the realm of faery, a wife will have her way: Pluto may espouse the cause of the injured husband, but the queen knows a subtler magic than his own.

It would have been easy, had Chaucer so wished, to give the tale a tragic ending; but it is conceived from beginning to end in the spirit of a 'humor' comedy of Ben Jonson. The tragedy is there, to be sure, but it is concealed so successfully from its victim that he ends his days, for aught we know, in the paradise of fools whose bliss is their ignorance.

The *Merchant's Tale* was written when Chaucer was at the height of his power, after he had already achieved one masterpiece of the same general character in the *Wife of Bath's Prologue*.[1] Immoral the tale certainly is; but its immorality is not insidious, and the spirit of broad comedy which pervades the piece is all but sufficient to sweeten the unwholesomeness of it.

THE SQUIRE'S TALE

When Milton in *Il Penseroso* wished to summon up the memory of Chaucer, he did so by an allusion to the *Squire's Tale*: —

> Or call up him that left half-told
> The story of Cambuscan bold,
> Of Camball, and of Algarsife,

[1] That the *Merchant's Tale* is later than the *Wife of Bath's Prologue* is shown by the direct allusion to the latter at line 1685.

And who had Canace to wife,
That owned the virtuous ring and glass,
And of the wondrous horse of brass
On which the Tartar King did ride.

Another of England's greater poets, the author of the *Faerie Queene*, took upon himself the task of completing the half-told story, after addressing 'Dan Chaucer' in terms of deepest reverence and love.[1] A lesser poet, Leigh Hunt, who made a modernization of the *Squire's Tale*, entertained the idea of writing a conclusion to it, but wisely refrained.[2] The critic, Warton, placed the tale next after that of the Knight as 'written in the higher strain of poetry.'

A considerable part of the attention which this tale has received is due, I fancy, to the very fact that it was left half told. I am inclined to suspect that Chaucer abandoned the work because he did not know how to conclude it; and if this is so, any attempt on our part to guess its conclusion must be futile. The Tartar King is provided with a wondrous horse of brass, on which he can fly 'as hye in the air as doth an egle,' and in the space of four and twenty hours arrive in whatsoever land he will. To his daughter, Canace, is given a magic ring, whose virtue is such that with it on her finger she shall understand the voices of all the birds of heaven and converse with them in their own tongue, and a mirror in which all the deeds of men are revealed as if face to face. There is a magic sword, too, which will pierce the strongest armor, and like Achilles' spear 'is able with the change to kill and cure.' In the second part, Canace, by virtue of her

[1] *Faerie Queene*, Book 4, Cantos 2 and 3.

[2] See Lounsbury, *Studies in Chaucer*, 3. 211–212. One John Lane, a friend of Milton's father, produced in 1630 a long continuation of the tale, which has been published by the Chaucer Society. It is miserable nonsense.

ring, learns a tale of unhappy love from a falcon, who is, we must suppose, some princess laboring under an enchanter's spell. There are great wars toward. With such a beginning, what is not possible? The imagination roams through limitless fields of pleasing conjecture. The very name of magic has its fascination for our poor race of mortals, shut in as we are by the relentless barrier of the possible and the actual. Any conclusion which Chaucer, or any other poet, could have written would be barren and commonplace compared with our vague imaginings. And this is inevitable in the very nature of the case. Let the magic horse, the ring, the sword, and mirror be put to practical use, let their use result in any definite achievements or events, and they are immediately vulgarized. Once more the tyranny of the actual, if not the possible, shuts us in; and the boundless scope of the imagination is narrowed to nothing. An exactly similar case is presented by Coleridge's wonderful fragment, *Kubla Khan*, which deals, be it noticed, with the same Oriental dynasty as Chaucer's tale, Kubla Khan being a grandson of Gengis Khan, whose name becomes the Cambinskan of Chaucer. This poem is unfinished for the good reason that it could not be finished; it is essentially a fragment; and so great is Coleridge's art that the fragment may be said to constitute a distinct literary form. Much might be said of the beauty of the incomplete, of the desirability of leaving things half finished. The beauty of a spring day is in large measure the promise of summer days to come, which, when they come, fall often below our expectation. The unequaled charm of a noble youth rests on the unlimited possibility of noble action which lies before him. The early death of Keats has served to magnify fourfold the estimate set upon his work. We have no proof

that he would ever have surpassed the actual achievements he has left to us. Indeed, there are indications that he would not have done so. Yet such is the power of the incomplete, that we hear critics speak of him as one who might have been a second Shakespeare. Or, to take an example from what might have been, suppose that Milton had been cut off after he had completed only the first two books of *Paradise Lost*. What should we not have expected of the ten remaining books of a poem which opens so magnificently? But we have the poem entire, and know that the level of the first two books was higher than Milton could consistently maintain. The more one considers the keenness of Chaucer's critical insight and the strange 'elvishness' of his character, the more strongly one suspects that Chaucer recognized this power of the incomplete, and deliberately left his tale half told.

In no case has Chaucer more happily suited the tale to the character of the teller than in the case of the Squire. As the Knight, his father, tells a noble tale of tournament and knightly love, so his son, the Squire, turns naturally to a theme of chivalry. But there is a difference. Warton says that 'the imagination of this story consists in Arabian fiction engrafted on Gothic chivalry.' It is in the days of our youth that the fiction of the *Arabian Nights* appeals most strongly to us. Before the 'shadows of our prison house' close about us, we are all impatient of the actual, and dream of the infinite possibilities that might follow on the impossible. The Knight has lived his life and worked his work, and so his story, however ideal in its spirit, is of things accomplished, of deeds already done. The Squire, though

> He had been somtyme in chivachye,
> In Flaundres, in Artoys, and Picardye,
> And born him wel, as of so litel space,

is living mainly in the infinite future, where all things are possible. All that his father has accomplished is as nothing beside what he intends to do. His charm, like that of the tale he tells, is in large measure the charm of incompleteness.

Sources.

There is hardly a feature of the *Squire's Tale* which does not find its parallel in the Oriental literature of magic. A reader whose acquaintance with this literature is confined to the *Arabian Nights* will find such parallels in abundance.[1] But no single narrative which Chaucer might have used has yet been discovered. Whether any such narrative existed, or whether Chaucer merely allowed his imagination to play freely with the familiar themes of Arabian magic, filling in his background with such scraps of knowledge about Tartary and the Far East as he had picked up in reading or conversation, we cannot say. The general character of the tale, and in particular its unfinished state, would favor the latter theory.

Professor Skeat tried hard to prove that Chaucer's acquaintance with Gengis Khan, and with such features of local color as his story presents, was derived from the famous book of the travels of Marco Polo; but this theory has been shown to be absolutely without foundation.[2] Such are Chaucer's mistakes and confusions that it is hard to believe that he could have had any connected account of the Tartars before him.[3]

[1] The whole subject has been investigated with great thoroughness by Mr. W. A. Clouston, in an article entitled *On the Magical Elements in Chaucer's Squire's Tale*, appended to the Chaucer Society's edition of John Lane's continuation of the *Squire's Tale*.

[2] J. M. Manley, 'Marco Polo and the Squire's Tale,' *Publications of the Modern Language Association of America*, 11. 349–362.

[3] Perhaps this is the best place to notice another exploded theory, that of Professor Brandl, who with characteristic German ingenuity has found in the *Squire's Tale* an elaborate allegory of the English court, Cambinskan representing Edward III, and Canace his daughter-

THE FRANKLIN'S TALE

The portrait of the Franklin in the General Prologue, though an attractive one, hardly does full justice to this 'worthy vavasour.' We are shown a prosperous country land-holder, a man of sixty or over, we may suppose, with beard as white as the daisies which stud his spacious meadows, and with countenance as ruddy as the wine which lies in his well-stocked cellar. It takes no extraordinary power of clairvoyance to know that his table must be loaded with 'alle deyntees that men coude thinke,' while the general kindliness and good-nature of his bearing tell us that there is always room at his board for another guest. We like the good man, and should be glad enough to receive an invitation to spend a week-end in a house where it 'snows meat and drink.' But we dismiss him from our thought as 'Epicurus owne sone' for his good living, and as the Saint Julian of his country for generous hospitality. It is only after we have traveled a day or two with him on the Canterbury road, and heard him tell his noble tale, that we see more intimately into his life and aspirations.

The Franklin has much in common with the better type of the 'self-made man.' He has at his disposal all that money can buy, and he has held office in his own county; but he is uncomfortably conscious of a certain lack of 'gentility,' — betrayed by his fondness for the words 'gentil' and 'gentilesse,' — and of the full education which would adorn his prosperous estate.

> 'But, sires, bycause I am a burel man,
> At my biginning first I yow biseche
> Have me excused of my rude speche;
> I learned never rethoryk certeyn.'

in-law Constance, second wife of John of Gaunt (*Englische Studien*, 12. 161). This fanciful theory has been demolished by Professor Kittredge, in *Englische Studien*, 13. 1–25.

That he has made up in some way or other for the lack of early advantages, is shown by the excellence of his tale, and by the more or less learned discussions which he rather needlessly introduces, such as the historical-mythological catalogue of women who died rather than sully their honor, which occupies lines 1366–1456. His enlightened views and sound good sense are shown in the opinion he expresses of astrology: —

> And swich folye,
> As in our dayes is nat worth a flye.

Once he indulges in one of the figures of rhetoric of which he has professed his ignorance: —

> But sodeinly bigonne revel newe
> Til that the brighte sonne loste his hewe;
> For th'orisonte hath reft the sonne his light;

but his good sense and native honesty bring him down to earth again in the line which follows: —

> This is as muche to seye as it was night.

Conscious that, with all that he has acquired and attained, he can never be quite the complete gentleman, he would fain be the father of a gentleman; but his hopes are disappointed by the unfortunate vulgar proclivities of his son and heir. To the gallant young squire he says: —

> 'I have a sone, and, by the Trinitee,
> I hadde lever than twenty pound worth lond,
> Though it right now were fallen in myn hond,
> He were a man of swich discrecioun
> As that ye been! fy on possessioun
> But-if a man be vertuous withal.
> I have my sone snibbed, and yet shal,
> For he to vertu listeth nat entende;
> But for to pleye at dees, and to despende,
> And lese al that he hath, is his usage.
> And he hath lever talken with a page
> Than to commune with any gentil wight
> Ther he mighte lerne gentillesse aright.'

So might a Toledo oil-magnate bewail the vicious tendencies of the son whom he is lavishly maintaining at Yale or Harvard. Considering this, there is something of pathos as well as fine generosity, in the enthusiastic praise which the Franklin bestows on the Squire for his noble tale, which we, alas! can never hear to its end: —

> 'In feith, Squier, thou hast thee wel yquit,
> And gentilly; I preise wel thy wit.'

This outburst of praise calls the Host's attention to the Franklin; and, though he disposes of the good man's most cherished aspiration with a contemptuous 'straw for your gentillesse!' he nevertheless singles him out as the teller of the next tale.

Sources.

Were it not that in other instances we find Chaucer assigning a fanciful, rather than the actual, source for his compositions, the opening lines of the *Franklin's Tale* would seem sufficient evidence that its source was a courtly Breton lay, such as those that have come down to us in French dress from the hand of Marie de France.

> Thise olde gentil Britons in hir dayes
> Of diverse aventures maden layes,
> Rymeyed in hir firste Briton tonge;
> Which layes with hir instruments they songe,
> Or elles redden hem for hir plesaunce;
> And oon of hem have I in remembraunce,
> Which I shal seyn with good wil as I can.

But no such lay has been preserved to us.[1] Tales similar

[1] Dr. W. H. Schofield has attempted to prove from an account of a Briton chieftain, Arviragus, in Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia*, that such a legend actually existed in South Wales, whence it was carried to Brittany, and written up, perhaps with accretions from another source ultimately Oriental, by a poet of the school of Marie de France. (*Publications of the Modern Language Association of America*, 16. 405–449.) The argument is ingenious, and one would be glad to accept it; but it consists of hypotheses rather than of evidence. An elaborate refutation

to that of the Franklin have been found in Sanskrit, Burmese, Persian, and other Oriental tongues; and a still closer parallel is offered in a tale told by Boccaccio in his early prose work the *Filocopo*, and again, with slight variations, in the *Decameron*, Day 10, Nov. 5.[1] In Boccaccio's version, a faithful wife promises an importunate lover, of whom she wishes to be rid, that she will give him her love, if he can make a garden bloom and bear fruit in mid-January. The lover accomplishes this by the help of a magician; and the story concludes as does the Franklin's. Of the two parallel tales of Boccaccio, that in the *Filocopo* is somewhat nearer to Chaucer's; and it is possible that Chaucer may have drawn his material thence, changing the scene to Brittany, altering the names in accordance with this change, and considerably modifying the story itself; but it is more probable that his source was a French *fabliau*, closely related to the source whence Boccaccio's tale was drawn. The fact that the scene was laid in Brittany would be sufficient to explain the fanciful attribution to a Breton *lai*. The history of the tale, as it traveled from the distant east to Chaucer's study, was probably similar to that of the story which we have in the *Pardoner's Tale*.[2] It is interesting to notice that Beaumont and Fletcher have utilized the plot of the *Franklin's Tale* for a one-act play entitled *The Triumph of Honour*.

The chief beauty of this tale resides in the noble

of Dr. Schofield's contention is given by P. Rajna in *Romania*, 32. 204–267. ('Le Origini della Novella narrata dal Frankeleyn nei *Canterbury Tales* del Chaucer.')

[1] The story also appears in the twelfth canto of Boiardo's *Orlando Innamorato*. See *Originals and Analogues to Some of Chaucer's Canterbury Tales*, pp. 289–340, where several Oriental versions and the *Decameron novella* are given in translation. For the relation of Chaucer's version to Boccaccio's, see the article by P. Rajna, in *Romania*, 32, 204–267. Rajna's conclusions in this matter the present writer cannot accept.

[2] Cf. above, p. 224.

spirit which pervades it. The unswerving fidelity of Dorigen, who cannot make merry when her husband is overseas, and who unhesitatingly rejects the advances of her lover Aurelius; the utmost loyalty to the spoken pledge, which impels Arviragus to send his wife to keep a promise, though spoken in jest — are so potent in their power for good that not only the passionate lover, but the poor scholar in far-off Orleans, are compelled to an equal nobility. Ten Brink says of the poem: 'The contagious influence of good, proceeding from a common as well as from a noble disposition, and the wondrous power of love, are beautifully symbolized in this fable. And throughout all his story Chaucer gives special prominence to the idea by which the whole receives its internal completion, viz., the idea that love and force mutually exclude each other, while patience and forbearance belong to the very essence of love.'[1] Literary Qualities.

Beautiful as is this picture of married love, Chaucer has taken care that it shall not become sentimental, by touching it here and there with his own peculiar humor. Thus with sly ambiguity he asks, after describing the bliss of Arviragus and Dorigen, —

> Who coude telle, but he had wedded be,
> The joye, the ese, and the prosperitee
> That is betwixe an housbonde and his wyf?

And again in describing the grief of Dorigen at her husband's departure for Britain: —

> For his absence wepeth she and syketh,
> As doon thise noble wyves *whan hem lyketh.*

After giving us the passionate 'complaint' uttered by Aurelius in his love-longing, there is on the author's part a playful assurance of his own unconcern: —

[1] *History of English Literature* (English trans.), 2. 169.

> Dispeyred in this torment and this thoght
> Lete I this woful creature lye ;
> Chese he, for me, whether he wol live or dye.

The poem ends in the manner of the *débat* literature so popular in mediæval France, with a question addressed to the judicious reader, or rather to the members of the pilgrimage : —

> Lordinges, this question wolde I aske now,
> Which was the moste free, as thinketh yow?

Which of the three — Arviragus, who sacrifices his wife to his sense of honor, Aurelius, who foregoes his coveted opportunity, or the clerk of Orleans, who in remitting his promised fee, showed that he too 'coude doon a gentil dede' — shows the greatest freedom, i. e., generosity? One would be glad to hear the discussion which must have arisen among the company when this question was propounded; but one of the several gaps in the unfinished framework of the *Canterbury Tales* follows the *Franklin's Tale*, and the reader is left to imagine the debate, and to settle the burning question by himself. In attempting the question, one must decide whether or not the terrible sacrifice of Arviragus was necessary, or even justifiable. Probably most modern readers will decide that it was neither. A jesting promise is made on condition that the seemingly impossible be performed. By calling in the aid of magic, the condition is fulfilled. Surely it is a hyperquixotic sense of honor which shall insist on the fulfillment of a pledge so circumstanced. But the Middle Age apparently admired such extreme conceptions of honor,[1] and I, for one, am not willing to say that they were wrong. It would not hurt our modern world to be a little more quixotic in its sense of honor. I am quite ready to grant that in this in-

[1] Cf. The tale of Nathan and Mithridanes, in Boccaccio's *Decameron*, Day 10, Nov. 3.

stance Arviragus was mistaken, that truth did not demand the sacrifice; even, if you will, that the sacrifice should not have been made; and yet his act is none the less a noble act. I cannot see that its spirit is very different from the spirit of the equally quixotic command, 'If any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloke also.' In the event, at least, Arviragus is justified; his noble deed begets nobility in others; and we are shown once more that it is indeed possible to overcome evil with good.

THE SECOND NUN'S TALE

Of the Second Nun, to whom the manuscript rubrics assign the legend of St. Cecilia, we know nothing beyond the mere fact of her presence in the pilgrim-company as attendant on the Prioress. At the end of the description of Madam Eglantine in the General Prologue we read: —

> Another Nonne with hir hadde she,
> That was hir chapeleyne.

Chaucer has provided no introductory prologue to the tale itself to inform us further of the good lady's personality, nor of the circumstance of her narration. The appropriateness of tale to teller is, however, obvious at a glance. Like the tale of the Prioress, the story breathes that spirit of peculiar religious exaltation which we associate with all that is most beautiful in the monastic life.

Date of Composition.

That the legend of St. Cecilia was not originally intended for its present place as one of the *Canterbury Tales* might be shown from the internal evidence of the tale itself. In open contradiction to the idea of oral narration on the pilgrimage is line 78: —

> Yet preye I yow that *reden that I wryte.*

Equally inconsistent is line 62, in which the speaker refers to herself as 'unworthy *sone* of Eve.' We have, however, a piece of external evidence on the question which is even more convincing. In the *Legend of Good Women* Dan Cupid says of the poet: —

> He hath in prose translated Boëce,
> And mad the Lyf also of seynt Cecyle.

This evidence taken together may be held to prove that the tale was written before 1385, and was not revised for its present position.

That the legend was written after Chaucer's Italian journey of 1373 is rendered probable by the fact that lines 36–51 are translated from the last canto of Dante's *Paradiso*. From its general stylistic qualities, and in particular from the closeness with which it follows its original, critics have been inclined to ascribe it, with Ten Brink, to the very beginning of Chaucer's so-called Italian period, that is, to the years 1373–74. Probability favors this ascription; but it must be remembered that we have no positive evidence in its support.[1]

Source.

The source of the *Second Nun's Tale* is suggested by the rubric which precedes line 85: *Interpretacio nominis Cecilie, quam ponit frater Iacobus Ianuensis in Legenda Aurea.* This Jacobus Januensis, better known as Jacobus a Voragine, was a Dominican friar, who in 1292 was consecrated archbishop of Genoa; and his *Golden Legend*, 'a collection of the legendary lives of the greater saints of the mediæval church,' was one of the most popular books of the Middle Ages. Professor Koelbing has shown, however, that Chaucer's original was a Latin life of St. Cecilia, which, though closely related to that in the *Golden Legend*, is in some particulars nearer to the

[1] Dr. Koeppel, in *Anglia*, 14. 227–233, favors a date later than that of *Troilus and Criseyde*.

life of the saint written by Simeon Metaphrastes,[1] printed in a collection of saints' lives by Aloysius Lipomanus, Louvain, 1571. There is no proof that Chaucer used the French translation of the *Golden Legend* by Jehan de Vignay, nor any of the earlier English accounts of St. Cecilia.[2]

Though we do not possess Chaucer's exact original, we know from the extant Latin versions, from which it probably differed only in minute details, that his translation is exceedingly literal. The following extract from the version of Metaphrastes may be compared with Chaucer's corresponding lines: 'Dixit Almacius præfectus: Elige tu unum ex duobus, aut sacrifica aut nega te esse cristianam, ut delicti tibi detur venia. Tunc dixit ridens sancta Cæcilia: O judicem pudore necessario affectum! Vult me negare et esse me innocentem, ut ipse me faciat crimini obnoxiam.'[3]

In Chaucer's English this becomes: —

> Almache answerde, 'chees oon of thise two,
> Do sacrifyce, or Cristendom reneye,
> That thou mowe now escapen by that weye.'
> At which the holy blisful fayre mayde
> Gan for to laughe, and to the juge seyde,
> 'O juge, confus in thy nycetee,
> Woltow that I reneye innocence,
> To make me a wikked wight?' quod she.

This passage is typical of Chaucer's procedure throughout, so that we may agree with Professor Koelbing's assertion that 'apart from the charming versification, which seems splendidly suited to the subject, Chaucer's proprietorship in the composition consists only in single words or half lines, which he used to fill out his verse.'

Any criticism of the tale, then, must be a criticism of

[1] *Englische Studien*, 1. 215–248.
[2] See *Originals and Analogues*, pp. 189–219.
[3] From Koelbing's article cited above, p. 223.

the original saint's legend rather than of Chaucer. It is a story of a type to which our modern world is inclined to do small justice. Full as it is of the supernatural and the impossible, it lends itself readily enough to the laugh of the mocker; while even the human motives of the saintly heroine are far from the comprehension of to-day. Yet for its pathos, its noble spirit of high religion, above all for the irresistible force of Cecilia's sweet personality, the tale may still be read and loved by all whose hearts are not completely hardened. Chaucer, apparently, took the tale quite seriously; the genuineness of its religious feeling cannot be questioned. So that his deliberate choice of theme, not in the first place for the Second Nun, but for himself, is a valuable piece of testimony as to his deeper and more serious life.

The Tale Itself.

Of the historical Cecilia little is known beyond what can be inferred from the developed legend. Her martyrdom is usually assigned to the reign of the Emperor Alexander Severus (A. D. 222–235); but even this is not certain. St. Cecilia's present fame as patroness of music and inventor of the organ is a later development, of which Chaucer probably never heard. The Cecilia of the legend sang to God in her heart 'whyl the organs maden melodye,' and she received an angel visitant; but the two facts are unconnected, and the mention of the organ is only a passing one.

THE CANON'S YEOMAN'S TALE

When the Second Nun has finished her tale of St. Cecilia, and the company have reached the little village of Boghton under Blee, they are joined by two newcomers, the Canon and his Yeoman, who have ridden furiously to overtake them, fearing perhaps to travel alone through the robber-haunted Forest of Blean.

The black-clothed Canon speaks but little; but his silence is more than atoned for by the garrulous loquacity of his Yeoman. Little by little it transpires that the Canon is a practicer of alchemy. The Yeoman will not be silenced: —

> And whan this chanon saugh it wolde nat be,
> But his yeman wolde telle his privetee,
> He fledde awey for verray sorwe and shame.

Chaucer had little, if any, of the reformer's spirit in his make-up; but with his temperamental tendency to see the comic in human life, he had a keen interest in hypocrisy and clever imposture, an interest which at times almost extends to an intellectual admiration. With lively intellectual interest, but with no trace of bitterness, he shows up the lying devices of his Pardoner. With less detail, but with rich humor, Clerk Nicholas in the *Miller's Tale* is made to exemplify the tricks of the false astrologer. The *Canon's Yeoman's Tale* is a complete *exposé* of alchemy made by one of its victims, and consequently made with a personal bitterness that has led many critics to the unwarranted supposition that Chaucer himself had fallen prey to the imposture. Chaucer may have believed, as did all the most learned of his time, in the theoretical possibility of transmuting the baser metals into gold. The fullness and accuracy of his acquaintance with the subject, as shown in the tale itself, prove that his intellectual curiosity had led him to explore the mysteries of the science. Even the *Canon's Yeoman's Tale* itself indicates no active disbelief in the theory of alchemy. But his sound common sense told him that in actual experience the search for the philosopher's stone had been but a pursuit of will-o'-the-wisp, when it had not been downright fraud and imposture. We can be sure, I think, that the only use Chaucer made of alchemy was

in transmuting the base metal of human greed and folly into the finer gold of humor. The bitterness of the *Canon's Yeoman's Tale* is the dramatic indignation of the Yeoman, who at last discovers that he has been made a gull. Needless to say, it gives the highest realism and color to the tale.

When his master takes to flight, and the Yeoman finds himself free of the incubus that has for seven long years possessed him, robbing him of money and of health, his pent-up scorn finds vent in a long rambling exposition of alchemical mysteries. He has learned his lesson well; and the 'terms' of the 'elvish craft,' 'so clergial and so queynte,' flow freely from his loosened tongue. There is no order in his speech; and the majority of his terms are, of course, meaningless to us. The total effect is one of bewildering confusion, precisely the effect which Chaucer wished to produce. Deliciously humorous is his description of the sudden bursting of the pot which contained the mixture which was to bring great wealth. Some said this, and some said that, but the bitter fact remained that months of labor had gone for nothing.

The first part of the tale deals with the futile attempts of serious alchemy, in which the deceivers are themselves deceived, and all alike share in the common failure. The second part, which is the more interesting, tells of the clever trick of legerdemain by which another canon, less scrupulous than the one we have met, convinces a gullible priest that he actually possesses the elixir, and disposes of his worthless receipt for the considerable sum of forty pounds.

No source for the tale is known, and probably none is to be sought. Very likely the anecdote of the second part is founded on an actual occurrence. A trick closely similar to this was actually perpetrated in New York

in the summer of 1890.[1] After all, the chief interest of the tale lies not so much in its substance as in the personality of the Yeoman who relates it.

THE MANCIPLE'S TALE

The journey to Canterbury is nearly ended, and already the company is in sight of a little town, —

> Which that ycleped is Bob-up-and-doun,
> Under the Blee, in Caunterbury weye.

Meanwhile honest Hodge of Ware, the Cook of London, has been taking advantage of his vacation days to sample the wine or ale of every wayside tavern, until he has got himself disgracefully drunk. He talks through his nose, breathes heavily, and finally falls from his horse into the mire, whence he is raised into the saddle again only after much shoving and lifting. Obviously, he is in no condition to tell the tale which mine Host demands of him; so that the Manciple's ready offer to serve in his stead is gladly accepted. On the first day of the pilgrimage, it will be remembered, the Cook had been called on for a tale, and had responded with the story of Perkin Revelour, which Chaucer left unfinished after the fifty-eighth line. That he should be called on a second time is proof that, when the Manciple's Prologue was written, Chaucer had not abandoned his original plan, as announced in the General Prologue, that each of the pilgrims should tell *two* tales on the road to Canterbury, and other two on the journey home.

The tale which the Manciple tells is a short and simple one, and needs no long exposition here. It is merely

[1] See Dr. C. M. Hathaway's edition of Ben Jonson's *Alchemist*, New York, 1903, pp. 87, 88. The introduction of this volume contains an interesting history of alchemy, its theory and practice, down to the present day.

a clever retelling of the fable of Apollo and Coronis in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, 2. 531–632. Chaucer has somewhat simplified the tale, and has added some moral reflections on the futility of trying to restrain a wife, and on the undesirability of repeating scandal, the latter taken from Albertano of Brescia's treatise on the *Art of Speaking and of Keeping Silence*.[1] The same tale is told by Gower in *Confessio Amantis*, 3. 783–830. Mr. Clouston has shown [2] that the tale is ultimately of Oriental origin, and that a version of the story, independent of that given by Ovid, was brought to Europe in the Middle Ages, and incorporated into the popular collection of tales entitled *Li Romans des Sept Sages*. But Chaucer's tale was probably drawn directly from Ovid, and certainly has no connection with this version last named.

THE PARSON'S TALE

In the life of the fourteenth century the Church played, for good and for evil, a part of the first importance, so that one need not be surprised that of the nine and twenty gathered together at the inn in Southwark, eleven are connected in one way or another with the ecclesiastical organization. Surveying this delegation as a whole, one is forced to the conclusion that the English Church had fallen on evil days ; and this conclusion is strengthened by the appearance of other churchmen quite as unworthy as these in the tales themselves. Unfortunately, the concurrent testimony of such diverse observers as Gower, Langland, and Wiclif proves that Chaucer's picture is not overdrawn. Against such a background of corruption and unworthiness, the poor parson of a town stands out with singular beauty, and the sympathetic portrait of him given

[1] See the article by Koeppel, in Herrig's *Archiv*, 86. 44.

[2] *Originals and Analogues*, 437–480.

in the General Prologue is justly regarded as one of the loveliest bits of Chaucer's poetry.

Often enough on the road to Canterbury the good priest must have been shocked by the words he had to hear; but he knew how to keep his peace. He 'ne maked him a spyced conscience.' Only once does he protest, when on the second day of the journey the Host turns to him and with an oath demands a tale. The Parson's mild rebuke calls forth from the Host a scornful answer: —

> 'I smelle a loller in the wind,' quod he.
> 'How! good men,' quod our hoste, 'herkneth me;
> Abydeth for goddes digne passioun,
> For we shall han a predicacioun;
> This loller heer wil prechen us somwhat.'

But the Shipman, that stout defender of the established faith, throws himself into the breach; the danger of a 'predicacioun' is for the present averted; and the unpleasantness blows over. Not, however, till all the other pilgrims have told their tales, late in the afternoon of the last day's ride, does the Host again make requisition for the Parson's tale. This time the Parson suffers his profanity to pass without rebuke. The Host's earlier fears of a 'predicacioun,' however, are fully realized. The Parson will tell no fable, either in rime or alliteration; his tale is to be 'moralitee and vertuous matere,'

> To shewe yow the wey, in this viage,
> Of thilke parfit glorious pilgrimage
> That highte Jerusalem celestial.

The whole company sees the appropriatness of ending 'in som vertuous sentence,' and the Parson is given free audience.

Much as we may admire the beauty of the Parson's character as parish priest, we are heartily glad that we

do not have to sit under his preaching of a Sunday. His sermon, or meditation, as he calls it, is interminably long, and for our modern taste at least, intolerably dull. It is full of excellent teaching, often expressed in trenchant language; but for effectiveness as a whole, it is immeasurably inferior to the brilliant sermon of the miserable Pardoner. The theme of the discourse is Penitence; but into its midst is introduced a digression on the seven deadly sins and their remedies, longer than all the rest of the sermon, which hopelessly destroys the unity and proportion of the whole.

Sources and Authenticity.

Of the source of the *Parson's Tale* Professor Skeat says:[1] 'It is now known that this Tale is little else than an adaptation (with alterations, omissions, and additions, as usual with Chaucer) of a French treatise by Frère Lorens, entitled *La Somme des Vices et des Vertus*, written in 1279.'[2] Until quite recently this statement was universally accepted; but we now know that the *Parson's Tale* and *La Somme des Vices et des Vertus* both go back to an earlier common original, the *Summa seu Tractatus de Viciis* of Guilielmus Peraldus, a Dominican Friar of the thirteenth century, while the main body of the tale which deals with penitence is from the *Summa Casuum Pœnitentiæ* of another Dominican of the same century, Raymund of Pennaforte.[3] In just what versions these treatises reached Chaucer we do not yet know; but,

[1] *Oxford Chaucer*, 3. 502.

[2] In the Chaucer Society's volume of *Essays on Chaucer*, pp. 503–610, may be found a minute comparison of the *Parson's Tale* and the *Somme*, by W. Eilers.

[3] *The Sources of the Parson's Tale*, by Miss Kate O. Petersen, Radcliffe College Monographs, 12. Boston, 1901. Favorably reviewed by E. Koeppel, in *Englische Studien*, 30. 464–467. Professor Liddell's 'A New Source of the Parson's Tale,' in the *Furnivall Miscellany*, 255–277, is no longer important.

though the *Somme* of Frère Lorens may have been consulted, it cannot have been his direct or even indirect source. Nor do we know whether the unfortunate piecing together of two distinct treatises is due to Chaucer, or to his immediate original.

So inartistic is this combination, that many critics, among them Ten Brink, have been unwilling to believe that the tale as preserved to us is Chaucer's authentic work. The whole digression on the seven deadly sins, and other lesser sections of the work, they regard as interpolations by another hand. But this method of higher criticism, by which everything offensive to the æsthetic taste of the critic is conveniently branded as interpolation, is fortunately going out of fashion; and in this particular case there is no adequate ground for supposing that the tale is not in all essentials as Chaucer wrote it.[1]

It will be remembered that the Host accused the Parson of being a 'loller,' i. e. a lollard, a follower of Wiclif. Superficially, the portrait of the Parson in the General Prologue suggests the 'poor preachers' who spread the reformer's teachings through the countryside; and a serious attempt has been made to prove that he was intended as a Wiclifite, and that Chaucer himself was in sympathy with the movement. Of course the Parson's 'meditation,' with its insistence on the necessity of auricular confession, is eminently orthodox; and if we accept it as genuine, we must at once dismiss the theory of his Wiclifite sympathies. Apart from this objection, the theory never had any adequate evidence in its favor. As for the Host's playful charge, one may readily enough answer that it is quite in

[1] Professer Koeppel, in Herrig's *Archiv*, 87. 33–54, has shown that many quotations from the section on the seven deadly sins occur in Chaucer's other works, just as we find similar quotations from Boethius and from the *Tale of Melibeus*.

accord with Chaucer's characteristic humor to have it suggested that the one thoroughly worthy ecclesiastic in the company is a heretic.[1]

The Retractation.

In the last paragraph of the *Parson's Tale*, under the caption 'Here taketh the makere of this book his leve,' is found a strange and sad leave-taking, in which the poet beseeches 'mekely for the mercy of god, that ye preye for me, that Crist have mercy on me and foryeve me my giltes: — and namely, of my translacions and endytinges of worldly vanitees, the whiche I revoke in my retracciouns: as is the book of Troilus; The book also of Fame; The book of the nynetene Ladies; The book of the Duchesse; The book of seint Valentynes day of the Parlement of Briddes; The tales of Caunterbury, thilke that sounen into sinne.' The only works that he does not regret are the translation of Boethius, 'and other bokes of Legendes of seintes, and omelies, and moralitee, and devocioun.' All for which we prize Chaucer he would rather not have writ! We should be glad to believe that these words are not authentic; but, remembering Tolstoi and Ruskin, we dare not. The sincerity of the passage cannot be questioned. We must believe that in the sadness of his latter days the poet's conscience was seized upon by the tenets of a narrow creed, which in the days of his strength he had known how to transmute into something better and truer. But into the sacredness of his soul we had better not pry too curiously.

'So here is ended the book of the Tales of Caunterbury, compiled by Geffrey Chaucer, of whos soule Jesu Crist have mercy. Amen.'

[1] Those who wish to pursue this Wiclifite theory may read the essay on 'Chaucer a Wicliffite,' in *Essays on Chaucer*, 227–292, by H. Simon.

APPENDIX

A FEW SUGGESTIONS AS TO THE STUDY OF CHAUCER

The first question that presents itself to the student of Chaucer is that of editions of the poet's works; and, unfortunately, no thoroughly satisfactory edition as yet exists. Those who can afford it will procure Skeat's edition in six volumes,[1] commonly known as the *Oxford Chaucer*, which, though seriously deficient in scientific method, contains in notes and introductions a vast store of valuable information. School editions of various portions of Chaucer's works are numerous, and from Morris and Skeat's edition of *The Prologue, The Knight's Tale, and The Nun's Priest's Tale*, (Clarendon Press), or from the similar editions of Liddell (Macmillan) and Mather (Houghton, Mifflin and Co.), the student may get a good introduction to the subject. Most readers, however, will choose either *The Student's Chaucer*, edited by Skeat (Clarendon Press, 1900), or the Globe Edition, edited by Pollard, Heath, Liddell, and McCormick (Macmillan, 1903). Each of these editions has its own advantages; but the present writer is inclined to prefer the former. The older editions of Chaucer's works are to be avoided.

For the study of Chaucer's language and verse the standard work is Ten Brink's *The Language and Metre of Chaucer*, originally written in German, of which an English translation is published by Macmillan (1902). The best existing glossary is that in the *Oxford Chaucer;* but, under the auspices of the Carnegie Institution, Professor Flügel of the University of California is now engaged on a Chaucer lexicon which will certainly supersede it. No concordance to Chaucer exists, the nearest approach to one being the rime-indexes published by the Chaucer Society.

[1] A seventh volume contains all the pieces which have in the past been erroneously included among Chaucer's works.

For the life of Chaucer, about which we know very little that is significant, the biographies given in any of the *recent* editions will serve, or the article by J. W. Hales in the *Dictionary of National Biography* may be consulted. The fullest presentation of the little we know is given in *Life Records of Chaucer* (Chaucer Society, 1900).

In the field of literary scholarship Lounsbury's three volumes of *Studies in Chaucer* (Harpers, 1892) is the most important single work. It is written in a diffuse but charming style, and though colored largely by the author's idiosyncrasies, contains a great deal that is of permanent value. Very suggestive are the pages devoted to Chaucer in Ten Brink's *History of English Literature*, vol. ii, Part I (English translation published by Henry Holt and Co., 1893). Less valuable is Ward's volume in the 'English Men of Letters Series' (Macmillan). Wider in its scope and more recent, but not very satisfactory, is Snell's *The Age of Chaucer* (Bell, 1901).

The great mass of Chaucerian scholarship is contained in the voluminous publications of the Chaucer Society, and in the various scholarly journals, English, German, and American. No complete bibliography of Chaucer has yet appeared to make this accessible. It is to make the results of this scholarship readily available to the student and general reader that the present volume has been undertaken. With this volume and with *The Student's Chaucer*, the reader will have in his possession all that is really essential to an understanding and appreciation of Chaucer's work. Let me suggest that before beginning to read, he acquaint himself with the elements of Chaucer's pronunciation, as given in Skeat's introduction. The acquisition of an approximately correct pronunciation is not at all difficult, and adds inestimably to one's appreciation of the music of Chaucer's verse. For practical purposes, it will be wise to disregard the distinction between the 'open' and 'close' values of *e* and *o*.

INDEX

INDEX

A. B. C., 57, 58, 207.
Against Women Unconstant, 78.
Alanus de Insulis, 66, 127.
Albertano of Brescia, 203, 284.
Alchemy, 23, 25, 281–283.
Alma Redemptoris, 198.
Alphonsus of Lincoln, 194–196.
Amorous Complaint, 79.
Anelida and Arcite, 68, 69, 168.
Arabian Nights, 151, 269, 270.
Astrolabe, 23, 85, 86.
Astrology, Chaucer's attitude towards, 22, 24.
Astronomy, Chaucer's interest in, 22.

Balade of Complaint, 79.
Beaumont and Fletcher, 274.
Benoit de Sainte-More, 96, 97, 99, 101.
Beowulf, 80.
Beryn, Tale of, 158, 159.
Boccaccio, 17, 18, 20, 21, 32, 65, 68, 98, 99, 100, 101, 103, 104, 111, 120, 127, 136, 137, 152, 163, 175, 188, 205, 207, 228, 243, 254, 255, 263, 274.
Boethius, 17, 19, 46, 70, 71, 73, 74, 75, 80–85, 91, 133, 207.
Book of the Duchess, 15, 37, 38, 58, 59–63, 66, 68.
Bukton, 76, 77.

Canon's Yeoman's Tale, 23, 280–283.
Canterbury Tales, 18, 135, 151–160.
Cento Novelle Antiche, 225–227.
Christianity, Chaucer's attitude towards, 26.
Chronology of Chaucer's writings, 15–19.
Cicero, 65, 127.
Claudian, 65.
Clerk's Tale, 37, 148, 253–262.
Clifford, Sir Lewis, 138.
Coleridge, 268.
Complaint of Mars, 63, 77.
Complaint of Venus, 77.
Complaint to his Empty Purse, 78.
Complaint to his Lady, 68.
Complaint to Pity, 58, 59.
Cook's Tale, 179, 180.
'Corinne,' 68, 69.
Criseyde, 98, 99, 102, 104, 105–115, 187.

Dante, 3, 4, 17, 35, 65, 68, 126, 127, 207, 243, 278.
Dares Phrygius, 95, 96, 97, 99.
Decameron, 152, 175, 188, 228, 254, 263, 274.
Deschamps, 138, 139, 141.
Dictys Cretensis, 94, 95, 97, 98.
Dramatic power of Chaucer, 38, 88–90.
Dryden, 173.

Envoy to Bukton, 76, 77.
Envoy to Scogan, 75, 76.

Faerie Queene, 35, 207.
Filostrato, 98, 101, 103.
Fletcher, 172, 173, 274.
Florus, 136.
Former Age, 38, 70, 71.
Fortune, 71.
Franklin's Tale, 24, 42, 148, 271–277.
Friar, 48.
Friar's Tale, 244–249.
Froissart, 64, 76, 138, 139.

Gautier de Coincy, 194.
Gentilesse, 25, 38, 74, 243.
Golden Legend, 278.
Gower, 11, 13, 26, 33, 137, 151, 183, 184, 240, 284.
Graunsoun, Otes de, 77.
Groups of *Canterbury Tales*, 152–154.
Guido delle Colonne, 98, 137, 207.
Guilielmus Peraldus, 286.
Guillaume de Deguilleville, 57.
Guillaume de Lorris, 16, 45–50.
Guillaume de Machault, 60, 61, 78, 138.

Herolt, John, 246, 247.
Homer, 93, 95, 98.
House of Fame, 18, 23, 30, 37, 123–134, 140.
Hugh of Lincoln, 193.
Humor of Chaucer, 39.
Hunt, Leigh, 267.
Hyginus, 137.

Jacobus a Voragine, 278.
Jakes de Basiu, 250.
Jean de Meun, 16, 20, 46–50, 81, 84, 220, 232.
Jerome, St., 232.
Jews, mediæval attitude towards, 191–194.
John of Gaunt, 59, 63.

Keats, 268, 269.
Kipling, 225.
Knight's Tale, 23, 24, 27, 36, 37, 39, 42, 66, 69, 150, 163–173, 269.

Lack of Steadfastness, 74, 75.
Langland, 11, 12, 26, 163.
Legenda Aurea, 278.
Legend of Cleopatra, 150.
Legend of Dido, 25, 150.
Legend of Good Women, 18, 26, 34, 135–150, 151, 182, 219.
Legend of Thisbe, 150.
Livy, 137, 220.
Lorens, Frère, 286, 287.
Lowell, 37, 62, 251.
Lydgate, 141, 206.

Machault, 60, 61, 78, 138.
Macrobius, 65, 127.
Manciple's Tale, 283, 284.
Man of Law's Tale, 38, 148, 181–187, 238.
Marco Polo, 270.
Marie de France, 210, 273.
Martianus Capella, 127.
Massuccio di Salerno, 174.
Mediævalism and the Renaissance, 3–7.
Melibeus, Tale of, 203.
Merchant's Tale, 262–266.
Merciless Beauty, 72.
Messahala, 86.
Miller's Tale, 36, 39, 173–179.
Milton, 266, 267, 269.
Monk's Tale, 33, 151, 203–207.

Nature, Chaucer's love of, 147–149.
Nun's Priest's Tale, 39, 68, 207–218.

Originality of Chaucer, 21.
Orosius, 136.
Otes de Graunsoun, 77.
Ovid, 20, 61, 97, 127, 129, 136, 137, 207, 284.

Palamon and Arcite, 103, 167, 168.
Pandarus, 119–122.
Papacy, England and the, 9–11.
Pardoner, 20, 48, 223, 224.
Pardoner's Tale, 36, 40, 222–231.
Parliament of Fowls, 18, 39, 63–68, 72, 140, 168.
Parson's Tale, 284–288.
Pathos of Chaucer, 40.
Pearl, 12.
Peasant's Revolt, 31.
Petrarch, 17, 18, 42, 69, 125, 126, 127, 132, 243, 254, 255, 259; supposed meeting with Chaucer, 255–257.
Physician's Tale, 219–222.
Pindarus Thebanus, 94.
Plutarch, 136.
Pope, 127, 264.
Predestination, Problem of, 24.
Prioress, 161, 190, 191.
Prioress's Tale, 38, 39, 190–198.
Proces of the Sevyn Sages, 152.
Prologue, 27, 145, 160–163.
Protestantism, 5.
Proverbs, 78.

Radicalism of Chaucer, 25.
Reeve's Tale, 39, 173–179.
Reinecke Fuchs, 211, 212.
Rembrandt, 160.
Renaissance contrasted with Mediævalism, 3–7.
Retractation, 288.
Reynard the Fox, 210.
Roman de Renart, 211, 212.
Roman de la Rose, 45–51, 59, 80, 137, 220–222, 232, 243.
Roman de Troie, 96–100.
Romans des Sept Sages, 284.
Romaunt of the Rose, 15, 45–56, 65.
Romulus, 210.
Rosemound, To, 72, 73.

St. Cecilia, 277–280.
Second Nun's Tale, 277–280.
Scholarship of Chaucer, 32.
Scogan, 76.
Shakespeare, 4, 101, 104, 105.
Shipman's Tale, 187–190.
Simeon Metaphrastes, 279.
Sir Gawayne, 12.
Sir Thopas, 30, 34, 39, 199–203.
Skepticism of Chaucer, 24.
Socrates, 192.
Somnium Scipionis, 65, 66, 127.
Spenser, 242, 267.
Squire's Tale, 266–270.
Statius, 68, 63.
Style of Chaucer, 41.
Summoner's Tale, 23, 39, 249–252.

Teseide, 65, 68, 69, 163–166.
Theophrastus, 232.
Thomas of Monmouth, 193.
Trivet, Nicholas, 182, 183, 184.
Troilus, 115–119.
Troilus and Criseyde, 17, 38, 40, 56, 84, 87–122, 124, 133, 167, 168.

Troy Story, 91–101.
Truth, 29, 30, 38, 73, 74.
Two Noble Kinsmen, 172, 173.

Valerius, 233.
Versification of Chaucer, 34.
Virgil, 98, 127, 129, 131, 136.

Warton, 123, 126, 128, 267, 269.
Whitfield, 231.
Wiclif, 13, 287.
Wife of Bath, 20, 48, 161, 238–240.
Wife of Bath's Prologue, 231–238.
Wife of Bath's Tale, 25, 39, 74, 238–244.
William of Norwich, 192, 193.
Womanly Noblesse, 79.
Words unto Adam, 69, 70, 91.

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